

The Pre-exilic Prophets

In the Bible the prophetic books are divided into the categories of major and minor prophets. These labels refer to the length of the books rather than their importance. The Bible does not order the prophetic books chronologically in their historical context. Historically speaking, the prophetic books are divided into the categories of the pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets. These are the prophets who ministered before Israel and Judah's exile from the Promised Land and those who ministered after Israel's return to the Promised Land. The prophetic books will be covered in these notes in the chronological order of their historical ministry, not in the order that they appear in the Bible.

The pre-exilic prophets can be divided into the pre-Assyrian and pre-Babylonian prophets. The pre-Assyrian prophets were **Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah**, and **Isaiah**. They ministered from 734 to 722 BC and warned of the coming of the Assyrian empire, who took the northern tribes of Israel into exile in 722 BC. The pre-Babylonian prophets were **Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah**, and **Ezekiel**. They ministered from 722 to 586 BC and warned of the coming of the Babylonian empire, who took the southern tribe of Judah into exile.

Introduction

The pre-exilic prophets are all tied together with the same historical context, purpose, and themes that go throughout their books.

Setting

The Bible begins with Yahweh sovereignly creating and ordering the world into a good creation full of life. In this creation, He created the Garden of Eden as His temple for humanity to dwell with Him (Gen. 1-2). In the garden, humanity would enjoy being in an intimate relationship with Yahweh and receiving the abundant fruit/blessings of the land. Yahweh created humans to be in the image of God, and they were commanded to rule and subdue creation as His representatives (Gen. 1:26-28). Since Yahweh is a good God who created an orderly and good creation, they were supposed to join Him in expanding His garden/kingdom across creation and maintain orderliness and goodness. As His image in His temple, they served as kings and priests over creation.

Instead of fulfilling this purpose, humanity chose autonomy and rebelled against Yahweh. As judgment for their sin, Yahweh removed them from the Garden of Eden and from His presence (Gen. 3). The image of God in humanity became corrupted with selfishness and sin, and humanity would now use their kingship to build kingdoms for themselves. Because of their sinful natures, their kingdoms would be corrupt and oppressive to others (Gen. 3-11). Though Yahweh justly judged their sin, He also continuously pursued them in a desire to restore them into a right relationship with Him. Eventually they built a tower to glorify themselves, in the city of Babylon, which fully manifested their autonomy, idolatry, and oppression of others (Gen. 11). For this, Yahweh disinherited the nations that came out of Babylon and would no longer use them to restore humanity and creation (Gen. 10-11; Deut. 32:8-9).

Yet Yahweh chose Abraham and called Him to exit Babylon and to follow Him as His image bearer (Josh. 24:2-3). Yahweh promised Abraham and his descendants that He would give them a land, make them the great nation of Israel, and bless them, so that they could be blessing to the

world by drawing the nations into themselves and restoring them into a right relationship with Yahweh (Gen. 12:1-3; 15).

Eventually the people of Israel grew in numbers but became enslaved in Egypt. So Yahweh demonstrated His great power and love for them by delivering them from their bondage to Egypt and cleansing them through their crossing of the Red Sea. At Mount Sinai He made a covenant with them, declaring that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them as His special possession, make them into a unique and distinct nation, and use them to be a blessing to all the nations (Ex. 19:3-6). Yahweh gave them the Law (a means to live righteously), the tabernacle (a place to dwell with Yahweh like in the Garden of Eden), and the sacrificial system (a means to repent and be cleansed of their sins).

From Mount Sinai Yahweh led them to the Promised Land of Canaan so that He could dwell with them, bless them with the fruit of the land, and make them a beacon of blessing and reconciliation to the nations (Josh. 3-6). Yet, like the pagan nations, Israel continuously sinned and rebelled against Yahweh, so He allowed the nations to attack them as a judgment for their idolatry and sin (Judg. 2:6-23). However, Yahweh continued to pursue them in reconciliation and mercifully delivered them from their oppressors. Even so, they did not change.

Eventually they rejected the kingship of Yahweh by asking for a human king like all the other nations had (1 Sam. 8). So, Yahweh gave them a leader, Saul, who was selfish and corrupt just like the kings of the pagan nations. However, Yahweh chose a new king, David, and made an everlasting covenant with him (2 Sam. 7). Yahweh promised David that his descendants would always sit on the throne of Israel. David foresaw a day when one of his descendants would become king and priest, and Yahweh would use him to destroy the pagan nations and reconcile the true people of God back to Yahweh (Ps. 110).

But David's son Solomon pursued the idols of the pagan nations rather than Yahweh. As a judgment for the entire nation's idolatry, Yahweh divided the nation into two kingdoms—the kingdom of Israel containing the ten tribes in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south (1 Kgs. 11:1-13). During the next three hundred years, the kings and the people of Yahweh continuously rebelled against His kingship and violated their covenant with Yahweh. Thus, Yahweh sent the pre-Assyrian prophets (734–722 BC) to rebuke Israel for their sins and warn them of the coming Assyrians, who would carry them out of the land and into captivity in 722 BC (2 Kgs. 17:7-41). Then Yahweh sent the pre-Babylonian prophets (722–586 BC) to rebuke Judah for their sins and warn them of the coming Babylonians, who would carry them out of the land into captivity in 586 BC (2 Kgs. 24). Yet the prophets also promised Yahweh's people that one day He would send his "Davidic servant" (Ps. 110) to destroy the pagan nations, restore the people back to the Promised Land, and reconcile them and the nations to Yahweh, and that Yahweh would cause them and the nations to prosper in the land of blessing.

Purpose

The purpose of the pre-exilic prophets was to reveal Yahweh's judgment of exile, His judgment against Israel and the nations, and His promise to restore the faithful to a renewed Promised Land where He would dwell with them and bless them. As a whole, the prophets condemned Israel for their sins of idolatry (love of Yahweh; Deut. 6:4-9), social injustice (love of neighbor; Lev. 18:19), and religious hypocrisy. To communicate this message, the prophets used poetry, which enabled them to express the deep emotions of Yahweh's anger and sadness over their sins,

as well as the joy of a future restoration. The prophets were also extremely repetitive because Israel did not listen, and He wanted to emphasize the certainty of His judgment and restoration.

Themes

Four main themes run through the pre-exilic prophets. First, Israel is Yahweh's covenant people. Yahweh continuously reminds Israel that they made a covenant with Him (Ex. 19-24) to obey Him and that He would bless them in return. If they did not obey Him or repent of their sins, then He would bring judgments upon them that would end in their exile from the Promised Land (Deut. 27-28).

Second, Israel had rejected their covenant God. Over and over, despite their promise and covenant with Yahweh, they pursued autonomy and sinned and rebelled against Yahweh. Despite many judgments, warnings, and acts of grace, they continued to reject Him and go after other gods.

Third, therefore, Yahweh had to judge them for their sins as He said He would in the Mosaic Covenant. He would do this with the coming of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires that would take them into exile.

Fourth, Yahweh promised them that He would restore His people back to the Promised Land. Despite their sin, Yahweh's greatest desire was to dwell with His people in an intimate relationship. Therefore, He would one day bring them back to the Promised Land and restore His relationship with them as well as His blessings. But not just them—the restoration of Israel would also include people from all the nations streaming into the new Jerusalem.

Chronology of the Kings and Prophets

United Kingdom

Saul (22-32) (1040-1008 BC)
Ish-Bosheth (2) (1008-1010 BC)
 David (40) (1010-970 BC)
 Solomon (40) (970-930 BC)
Kingdom Split (930 BC)

Kings of Judah (South)

Rehoboam (17) (930-913 BC)
 Abijah (3) (913-910 BC)
 Asa (41) (910-869 BC) *

 Jehoshaphat (25) (872-848 BC) *+

 Jehoram (8) (853-842 BC) +
 Ahaziah (2) (842-841 BC)

Athaliah (7) (841-835 BC)
 Joash (40) (835-796 BC) *

Amaziah (29) (796-767 BC) *

 Azariah/Uzziah (52) (792-740 BC) *+

 Jotham (16) (750-735 BC) *+

 Ahaz (16) (735-719 BC) +

Prophets

Samuel
 Nathan
 |
 Gad

Kings of Israel (North)

Jeroboam I (22) (930-909 BC)
 Nadab (2) (909-908 BC)
 Baasha (24) (908-886 BC)
Elah (2) (886-885 BC)
Zimri (7 days) (885 BC)
Tibni (5) (885-881 BC) +
 Omri (12) (885-874 BC)
 Ahab (22) (874-853 BC)

 Ahaziah (2) (853-852 BC)
Jehoram (12) (852-841 BC)

 Jehu (28) (841-814 BC)

Ahijah
 |
 Elijah
 |
 Micaiah
 |
 Elisha
 |
 Hazael (Aram)

Foreign Rulers

Shishak (Egypt)
 Benhadad I (Aram)

 Ethba'al (Sidon)
 Benhadad II (Aram)
 Mesha (Moab)

Benhadad III (Aram)

Jonah
 Hosea
 |
 Micah
 |
 Pekah (20) (752-732 BC)
 Hoshea (9) (732-722 BC)
Fall of Samaria (722 BC)

 Amos
 |
 Isaiah
 |
 Rezin (Aram)
 Tiglath-pileser III (Assyria)

 Shalmanezer V (Assyria)
 Sargon III (Assyria)

Hezekiah (29) (715-698 BC) *

Manasseh (55) (697-642 BC) +

Amon (2) (642-640 BC)

Josiah (31) (640-609 BC)

Jehoahaz (3 months) (609 BC)

Jehoiakim (11) (609-598 BC)

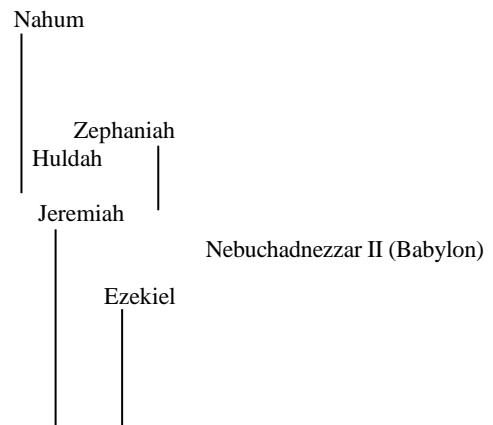
Jehoiachin (3 months) (597 BC)

Zedekiah (11) (597-586 BC)

Fall of Judah (586 BC)

Gedallah - Governor (3 months)

Sennacherib (Assyria)



Key:

- () Total years of reign
- + Reign overlaps with following king
- * Godly king
- The end of a family dynasty

Jonah

Jonah was a pre-Assyrian prophet who ministered during 793–753 BC, and, according to 2 Kgs. 14:25, he prophesied the military success of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC) the king of Israel. The main idea of the book of Jonah is that it emphasizes Yahweh's sovereign grace toward sinners. Jonah is unique among the prophetic books for this book is not about the message he spoke to the Israelites; rather, it is a narrative about his refusal to bless the nations.

The book of Jonah is arranged in four divisions (Jon. 1:1-16; 1:17-2:10; 3:1-10; 4:1-11). Chapters 1 and 3 are Jonah's interactions with foreigners, which contrast Jonah's selfishness with the foreigner's humility and repentance. Chapters 2 and 4 are Jonah's conversations with Yahweh. The book is also structured with a symmetrical design in which chapters 1–2 are parallel to chapters 3–4.¹

A Yahweh commissions Jonah (1:1-2)

B Jonah rejects his commission (1:3)

C The sovereign Yahweh reveals His power (1:4)

D The sailors submit to Yahweh and avert disaster (1:5-16)

E Jonah prays, thanking Yahweh for saving his life (1:17-2:9)

F The fish vomits Jonah onto dry land (2:10)

A' Yahweh commissions Jonah (3:1-2)

B' Jonah accepts his commission (3:3)

C' The sovereign Yahweh reveals His plan (3:4)

D' The Ninevites submit to Yahweh and avert disaster (3:5-10)

E' Jonah prays, complaining that Yahweh has saved Nineveh (4:1-3)

F' Yahweh uses a plant and worm to teach Jonah a lesson (4:4-11)

Jonah Runs Away from Yahweh (1:1-16)

1:1-3 The word of Yahweh came to Jonah and told him to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because of its wickedness. The Hebrew literally says “arise, go” (*quwm halak*), which communicates the idea of Jonah getting up and then going. This will later be contrasted with Jonah’s actions. This phrase also communicates a sense of urgency.

In contrast to Yahweh’s commanding him to “arise,” he went “down” (*yarad*) to Joppa and “down” (*yarad*) into the bottom of the boat. Later Jonah would go down into the belly of a fish and “down” (*yarad*) into the sea (Jon. 2:6). Twice the narrator states that Jonah fled “from Yahweh” and three times that he headed “to Tarshish.” The precise location of Tarshish is not known, but it seems it was located somewhere on the coast of the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea (Gen. 10:5; Ps. 72:10; Isa. 23:6, 10; 66:19). His running away from Yahweh was ridiculous since later Jonah would declare that Yahweh is the God of heaven who made the sea and land (Jonah 1:9). Though it was not possible to run away from Yahweh, it was possible for Jonah to run away from his responsibility to Yahweh. The narrator does not yet tell the reader why Jonah ran away.

1:4-6 Yahweh showed up in a great storm and whirlwind in order to judge Jonah and cause him to repent of his actions. Whenever the storm or whirlwind is mentioned, it always refers to the

¹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 408.

appearance of Yahweh in judgment or to His using a foreign military against another nation in judgment (Job 30:21-23; 36:27-33; 38:1-3; 40:6; Ps. 11:6; 50:3-4; Prov. 1:24-27; 10:24-25; Isa. 40:23-24; Jer. 22:22; 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 1:4; 10; 30:3; Jonah 1:4; Nahum 1:3; Zech. 7:14; Heb. 12:18). To emphasize the severity of the storm, the narrator personifies the ship and states literally in the Hebrew, “the ship thought that it would break apart.”²

1:7-12 The pagan sailors cried out to their gods and began to actively throw the cargo overboard to save their lives, which would have been a financial loss. In contrast, Jonah was below deck, sleeping and doing nothing. The captain told Jonah to “arise” (*quwm*), which was the same thing Yahweh had told him to do (Jon. 1:2). The sailors casted lots to see who was to blame for the storm, and the lot fell on Jonah. The sailors immediately wanted to know who he was and what he had done. Jonah proclaimed that he “feared [*yare’*] Yahweh, the God who made the land and sea.” The irony is that Jonah’s theology on the sovereignty of Yahweh was accurate, but he did not actually live in fear of Yahweh. They were immediately afraid, for they had never encountered a God who had made everything in creation and therefore controlled everything. At this point, as a prophet of Yahweh who stood before pagans in the midst of judgment, he should have himself repented and called them to repentance, but he did not. Instead he told them to throw him overboard to die, which would put his blood on their hands and bring greater judgment upon them. Jonah would rather have died than obey Yahweh.

1:13-16 In contrast, even the pagan sailors knew this was wrong and did everything in their power to row against the storm and prevent his death even though he was doing nothing to prevent their death and the judgment on Nineveh. Eventually they gave in and threw Jonah overboard. But before they did, they repented of their sin to Yahweh even though Jonah the prophet had never told them to do so or how. They had a greater fear of Yahweh and obedience than the prophet of Yahweh did. Immediately the storm ceased, and the sailors responded by fearing (worshiping) and making sacrifices to Yahweh, in contrast to Jonah the prophet, who did neither. Yahweh used Jonah for good even though he was not obeying Yahweh. And the pagan foreigners responded in greater faith and obedience than the chosen Israelite of Yahweh did.

Jonah Prays inside a Fish (1:17-2:10)

1:17-2:10 To grant Jonah’s request, Yahweh sent a giant fish (not whale) to swallow and “kill” Jonah. The fish would have been seen as the Leviathan, which is an image of chaos and sometimes death (Isa. 27:1). Jonah himself says that he cried out to Yahweh from the realm of the “grave” (*sheol*) (Jon. 2:2). And in his prayer describes his situation using terms like “the deep” (Jonah 2:3, 5), “the earth beneath” (Jon. 2:6), and “the pit” (Jon. 2:6), which are used to describe death and underworld. The narrator states that he was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. In ancient Near Eastern literature, the journey to the underworld, which was located at the bottom of the sea, was seen as a three-day journey.³ In a way, Yahweh had killed Jonah as a judgment for his disobedience, as He does with all prophets who disobey Him. But Yahweh did not allow him to truly get what he wanted (death) and would “resurrect” him so that he would have to obey the word of Yahweh (Jon. 1:2). Even though Jonah cried out to Yahweh, not once did he acknowledge and repent of his disobedience. He celebrated his deliverance, boasted of his superiority to the pagans, and made promises to do good and make

² See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 410.

³ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 412.

sacrifices. The fish returned him to where he had originally fled Yahweh and vomited him out onto the shore.

The Ninevites Repent (3:1-10)

3:1-5 The word of Yahweh came to Jonah a second time and told him to arise and go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim the message that Yahweh would give him. Jonah obeyed Yahweh, but the implication is that he was only going to go to Nineveh because he could not get away from Yahweh. The description of the city as “great” refers to its size. The reference to the three-day journey does not mean that it took three days to travel through the city, for this would make the city impossibly big for the ancient Near East. It either means that it took three days to travel to Nineveh or three days for Jonah to move through the whole city and its surrounding district preaching so that everyone would have heard the message.⁴

Jonah’s message to the Ninevites of “forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” was very lacking in detail. He never mentioned Yahweh, repentance, forgiveness, or how to escape the judgment. It was almost as if he did not want them to repent and wanted them to be judged. However, the reference to forty days suggests that there was time to repent.

3:6-10 In contrast to Jonah, the king led Nineveh in repentance and fasting. The king chose to repent of his sins even though there was nothing in Jonah’s message about the chance to repent or that the god that he spoke of was a forgiving God. When Yahweh saw that they had turned from their evil ways, He relented from His proclaimed judgment. Jonah had told them that they would be “overturned” (Jon. 3:4), and ironically the people “turned” their hearts from their evil (Jon. 3:10).

Yahweh Rebukes Jonah (4:1-11)

4:1-3 Now the narrator reveals why Jonah had run from Yahweh. Jonah was very “displeased” (*ra’ah*) and became angry that the Ninevites had repented. The word *ra’ah* translated “displeased” here is the same Hebrew word to describe the “wickedness” (*ra’ah*) of the Ninevites (Jon. 1:2).⁵ Jonah had not wanted to go to Nineveh because he knew that Yahweh was a “gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Ex. 34:6-7; Joel 2:13), and he wanted the Ninevites to die. He would actually rather die than see the Ninevites forgiven and spared. Jonah’s theological understanding of Yahweh’s character comes from Ex. 34:6-7, which is the essence of Yahweh’s character and what makes Him unique to all others. His theology was very well developed and precise, but he was a bitter man who did not reflect the character of Yahweh. He felt justified in his prejudice and did not want the mercy of Yahweh to extend to Nineveh even though he had gladly received and praised Yahweh when His mercy had been extended to him.

4:4-8 Yahweh asked Jonah if it was right for him to be angry, but Jonah did not reply. Instead, he sat down east of the city and watched with a hopeful desire for the city to be destroyed. Moving eastward in the Bible is imagery of and equates to moving away from the presence of Yahweh, either through rebellion against Yahweh or against Yahweh’s judgment (Gen. 3:24; 4:16; 11:2; 13:11; 28).

⁴ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 413.

⁵ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 414.

Yahweh caused a leafy vine to grow over Jonah to shade and ease his “discomfort” (*ra ‘ah*), the same word used to describe the wickedness (*ra ‘ah*) of Nineveh. The application of this word *ra ‘ah* to Jonah shows that Jonah was truly the “wicked” (*ra ‘ah*) one, for he was unable to repent and reflect the character of Yahweh. He condemned the Ninevites for their “wickedness” (*ra ‘ah*) when in reality he was more “wicked” (*ra ‘ah*) than them since they had repented.

Then Yahweh sent a worm to destroy the vine and an east wind (judgment) and the sun to scorch Jonah. Jonah grew faint and wanted to die. Yahweh asked him again if he had the right to be angry, and Jonah replied that he did and that he wanted to die. Never in the whole story did he care about anyone else (Ninevites or sailors) and was only preoccupied with himself and his own discomfort and so became depressed.

4:9-11 Yahweh then rebuked Jonah for caring more about the fleeting and insignificant plant than about all the Ninevites in the city. Yahweh as the God in heaven who created the land and sea truly cared for the Ninevites, who did not know the difference between right and wrong (“their right hand from their left”), and desired nothing more than to see them repent and to spare them from judgment (Ex. 34:6-7; Joel 2:13). This is the true character of Yahweh, and Jonah as His prophet was meant to reflect it. The Ninevites did not have the advantage of special divine revelation concerning the will of Yahweh. Therefore, morally speaking they were like children. Jonah’s understanding of Yahweh and of right and wrong and his failure to reflect Yahweh made him more “wicked” (*ra ‘ah*) than the Ninevites.

The narrator never says whether Jonah repented because the point is to hold the mirror up to the reader and ask the same question. Do you harbor prejudice against people and/or unforgiveness against others whom Yahweh desires to forgive? Do you care more about your material belongings and your own comfort than the fate of other children of Yahweh? Are you so self-absorbed that you do not reflect Yahweh’s image and character to others who do not know who Yahweh is and the difference between right and wrong?

Amos

Amos was a pre-Assyrian prophet who ministered to Israel (northern kingdom) during 767–753 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC) of Israel and the reign of Uzziah (792–740 BC) of Judah. The main idea of the book of Amos is Yahweh's rebuke of Israel for their idolatry and lack of social justice concerning the poor and His calling them to true worship.

The book of Amos is arranged in three major divisions. Amos 1:1–2:16 contains indictments against eight nations, including Judah and Israel, for their sins. Amos 3:1–6:14 contains three oracles rebuking Israel for their sins and ignoring Yahweh's warnings. Amos 7:1–9:15 contains five visions from Yahweh condemning Israel for their sins. The book ends with Yahweh's promise to restore Israel one day.

The Oracles Against the Nations (1:1–2:16)

This section is divided into an epilogue (Amos 1:1-2) and eight judgments against eight different nations (Amos 1:3-5; 1:6-8; 1:9-10; 1:11-12; 1:13-15; 2:1-3; 2:4-5; 2:6-16).

1:1-2 The epilogue begins with an introduction to Amos and his commission as a prophet. Amos was a shepherd living in Tekoa in Judah, about five miles south of Bethlehem. Most likely he was a breeder of sheep and a successful businessman. Yahweh called him to go to the northern kingdom of Israel to give a message of judgment. His judgment was given just two years before Yahweh sent an earthquake to warn Israel of their impending judgment (Amos 4:12-13; 8:8; 9:1, 5). Before the earthquake, Yahweh had already caused a drought to the pastures in Judah and Mount Carmel in Israel. Drought was a sign of covenant cursings for sin (Deut. 28:23-24).

1:3-5 Yahweh then gave judgments against eight nations, ending with Judah and Israel. Yahweh began with the nation farthest from Israel and spiraled around Israel from nation to nation getting closer and closer to the center until He came to Judah and then Israel at the center of His target. The fact that Yahweh began with judgment against the surrounding nations shows that Yahweh is sovereign over all the nations and holds them to His standard regardless of whether they worship Him or not. By starting each judgment against each nation with "for three sins of [name of the city], even for four" is a way of saying that Yahweh has many complaints against the nations. However, he never lists more than two before moving on to the next nation. This suggests that His target is somewhere else, which is realized when He gets to Israel.

The first city Yahweh condemned was Damascus of the nation of Aram, located northeast of Israel. Yahweh condemned them for attacking the tribes of Israel who lived in the Transjordan region east of the Jordan River. He would destroy them with the coming Assyrian empire, starting with their kings Ben-Haddad and Hazel. Though the Assyrians are not specifically mentioned here, they are the judgment Yahweh has in mind.

1:6-8 The second city was Gaza of the nation of Philistia, located west of Israel. Yahweh condemned them for attacking and selling the Israelites into slavery to the nation of Edom. He would destroy them with the Assyrian empire as well.

1:9-10 The third city was Tyre of the nation of Phoenicia, located north of Israel. Yahweh condemned them for violating their treaty and for selling the Israelites into slavery to the nation of Edom. He would destroy them with the Assyrian empire.

1:11-12 The fourth was the nation of Edom, located south of Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. Edom turned on Israel their brother and attacked

Israel and even the non-military people who were innocent (“slaughtered the women of the land”). Yahweh was going to burn the cities of Edom.

1:13-15 The fifth was the nation of Ammon, located east of Israel. The Ammonites were the descendants of Amon, a son of Lot, Abraham’s nephew. They went barbaric on Israel and even ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead. Yahweh was going to burn the cities of Ammon.

2:1-3 The sixth was the nation of Moab, located southeast of Israel. The Moabites were the descendants of Moab, a son of Lot, Abraham’s nephew. Yahweh condemned Moab for killing the Edomites and desecrating their bones. Yahweh was going to destroy their fortresses.

2:4-5 The seventh was Judah, located immediately south of Israel. Judah was the chosen people of Yahweh, and they had rejected His Law and worshiped idols. Yahweh was going to send fire against their fortresses.

2:6-16 The eighth—and real target—was the nation of Israel. Yahweh listed many more sins than four in judgment against Israel. The wealthy in Israel ignored and oppressed the poor, causing them to go deeper into debt. Then they sold them into slavery and denied them any kind of legal representation. The debtors also seized the clothes of the poor as collateral and taxed the people with wine, which the poor could not afford. Of all the nations, Israel was called to take care of the poor, not to get even wealthier off of them.

Amos 2:7b is normally translated as a father and son sleeping sexually with the same prostitute, but this does not fit the context of social injustice. The Hebrew literally says, “go to,” which is never used of sexual relations. Most likely this is the pagan *marzeah* banquet (Amos 6:4-7; Jer. 16:5-9), a religious social club where wealthy patrons would eat and drink in excess. The “young woman” was the hostess who served the father and son at the banquet.⁶ It pictures the exurbanite lifestyle of excess and indulgence at the expense of the poor. Israel also gave themselves over to false gods and got drunk on the very wine that they wrongfully seized from others in taxes.

Yahweh reminded Israel that they had not made themselves great—that He had given them their land and wealth. Yahweh had delivered them from the Ammonites and from their slavery in Egypt and had given them the Promised Land. Why were they who were once slaves enslaving others now? Yahweh also warned them of their sins with the raising of many prophets and Nazarites, and they turned around and led the Nazarites to violate their vows to Yahweh by getting them drunk. Yahweh was going to destroy them with the coming of the Assyrian empire.

Israel had turned their back on Yahweh’s word, perverted His word, conformed to the lifestyle of the world, and silenced those who did not conform. Israel chose to be autonomous and wrote for themselves a different worldview and law to follow. Not only that, but the nations around Israel were also under judgment because Israel had failed to be the image of God to them. Instead of Israel and Judah expanding the kingdom of Yahweh into the nations, the nations had corrupted Israel and Judah. Now they would fall under the same judgment as the pagan nations. Yahweh judges the nations largely on how they treated the other nations around them, but He judged Israel on how they treated the word of Yahweh and His covenant.

⁶ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 385.

The Oracles Against Israel (3:1–6:14)

This section is divided into three oracles against Israel (Amos 3:1-15; 4:1-13; 5:1-17) and two woes that strengthen the judgment of Amos's oracles (Amos 5:18-27; 6:1-4).

3:1-8 Yahweh had chosen Israel from all the nations to represent Him, but they had failed, so Yahweh was going to judge them. Yahweh then asked a series of rhetorical questions. The rhetorical questions in Amos 3:3-5 expect the answer of “no,” while those of Amos 3:6 anticipate the answer of “yes.” They all demonstrate a cause-and-effect pattern leading to the logical argument in Amos 3:7-8.⁷ Yahweh always gives warnings through His prophets of His coming judgments because He is a merciful God who desires that they repent. Yahweh was declaring judgment like a roaring lion, and Israel should be afraid and repent.

3:9-15 With sarcasm, Yahweh invited the Philistine and Egyptian cities to watch the destruction of Israel. These were immoral nations that had oppressed Israel. This invitation to watch Israel’s destruction puts the pagan nations in a position of moral superiority.⁸ Israel had become worse than the pagan nations to whom they were supposed to be a blessing and thus would share their same fate. Because Israel did not know how to do what was right, Yahweh would send an enemy to encircle them and loot their land. Israel would have only scraps of their former possessions to salvage. Yahweh would destroy the golden calf altar in Bethel and all of the people’s multiple homes. Even many kings did not have two homes.

4:1-5 The expression “cows of Bashan” describes the wealthy women of Samaria, who demanded that their cravings be satisfied. The women have oppressed the poor and have become well fed like cows. Ironically, Yahweh would carry them off to the slaughter as they had done to the poor. He would pack them away like fish in baskets to be carried off. The Hebrew in Amos 4:2b is difficult to translate but should be understood as “baskets” and “fisherman pots,” not “hooks” and “fishhooks” (NIV).

Yahweh sarcastically told them to continue to rebel and make sacrifices to their gods at Bethel and Gilgal so that their gods would help them. The irony is that their gods had not been helping them. They had also taken pride in their worship and sacrifices at the temple, thinking that its greatness would win Yahweh’s favor. But Yahweh called it sin, for sacrifices and religion were nothing without covenantal obedience (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

4:6-13 As a judgment Yahweh brought famine and sent locusts, plagues, and invading armies, which are all covenant curses for rebellion against Yahweh (Lev. 26; Deut. 27-28). Still they did not turn back to Yahweh, and their pagan gods were still helpless to help them. Now Israel was nothing but a smoldering stick pulled from the fire.

Now Israel must prepare themselves to meet their sovereign Judge in judgment. The same God who created the world was now coming to meet them in culminating and devastating judgment. The details of this judgment are not revealed until Amos 5 in order to create suspense and dread for what was coming. Israel thought that they were meeting Yahweh in worship at the temple (Amos 4:4), but in reality they were going to meet Him in judgment. For He is “Yahweh God of hosts (armies)” (“Yahweh God Almighty” in the NIV).

⁷ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 386.

⁸ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 388.

5:1-6 Yahweh sang a funeral song for Israel, who had fallen and could not get back up. Yahweh pleaded with them to seek Him so that they might live and escape the coming exile. Seeking the false priests and gods of Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba was futile, for they could not help Israel; they too would be swept away in the judgment of Yahweh. Yahweh is the only one who can save them and give them life to the fullest. If they do not seek Him, then He would break out in a fire against them.

5:7-9 The Israelites brought bitterness to the lives of others because they did not promote justice, and they cast righteousness to the ground. Therefore, Yahweh, as the sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe, would come in the whirlwind and de-create Israel by bringing darkness and the chaotic waters upon them in judgment (Gen. 1:1-2).

5:10-17 The Israelites not only had cast righteousness to the ground, but they were against anyone who promoted justice and honesty. They taxed the poor on their own crops and built up their houses at the expense of the poor. Therefore, they would not live in their own houses or drink from their own vineyards, for Yahweh was going to take them into exile.

Once again Yahweh gave them a chance to stay the judgment that was coming by calling them to seek good and not evil so that they might live. If they would do this, then the hosts of Yahweh would be with them, protecting them rather than moving against them. If not, then the hosts of Yahweh would bring wailing in the streets for the destruction of the cities and fields.

5:18-20 In the first of the two woes, Yahweh condemned the religious hypocrisy of the Israelites. The word “woe” (*hoy*) was used when mourning the dead. Yahweh mourned the coming death of Israel, for they held to a misunderstanding of their place on the day of Yahweh. “The day of Yahweh” is the day that Yahweh would come to deliver His people, judge the wicked, and establish His rule on earth. This first “day” on which Yahweh appeared, He delivered Israel from Egypt and dwelt with them in the Shekinah glory of Yahweh. This event looks forward to a future global deliverance and permanent kingdom of Yahweh on earth. Israel believed that this future day of Yahweh would once again deliver them from the evil nations and punish their wickedness. Yet Yahweh declared through Amos that this day would not bring light for Israel but darkness, for they were the wicked nation He was going to destroy. Yahweh would cut off all of Israel’s attempts to escape their judgment.

5:21-27 Yahweh hated and despised their festivals, sacrifices, and songs to Him because of their idolatrous devotion to the other gods. He condemned them for their religious hypocrisy, for they thought that bringing the best animals for sacrifices and singing their songs would please Him. Yahweh was going to drive them and their images and gods into exile.

In Amos 5:24 Yahweh called them to “let justice flow like a river and righteousness, like a never-ending stream”—contrasting the seasonal streams that dried up during the hot weather. The word “justice” (*mishpat*) means taking actions to correct the injustice in the lives of others. The word “righteousness” (*tsedquah*) in this context means to be in a right relationship with everyone despite their social standing. Thus, true worship of Yahweh is to live continuously in a right and godly way with others and to actively correct the social injustice one sees. Yahweh desires that one’s heart and behavior reflect His character and deeds. Loyalty expressed through obedience has always been the highest priority to Yahweh. If this is not true of one’s life, then sacrifice and songs mean nothing to Yahweh.

6:1-14 In the second woe, Yahweh condemned the leaders who thought they were superior to others, living in great wealth and entertainment at the expense of others. They thought they were so privileged that no judgment would come against them. Thus, Yahweh was going to stir a nation—the Assyrians—against Israel, and the leaders would be the first to go into exile. The very things they were proud of would be laid to ruin in judgment.

Visions of Israel's Judgment (7:1-9:15)

This division contains a series of five visions (Amos 7:1-3; 7:4-6; 7:7-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-14) with an interlude between the third and fourth visions (Amos 7:10-17).

7:1-9 In a vision, Yahweh showed Amos a great swarm of locusts coming to devastate the fields of Israel. Amos cried out to Yahweh for mercy and said that Israel could not handle it. Yahweh then chose not to bring the judgment.

In a second vision, Yahweh showed Amos a consuming fire coming to devastate the fields of Israel. Amos cried out to Yahweh for mercy and said that Israel could not handle it. Yahweh then chose not to bring the judgment.

In a third vision, Yahweh showed Amos a tin wall, meaning He was going to weaken all of Israel to the vulnerability of tin and bring grief to the nation. Traditionally scholars understood the Hebrew word *anak* to mean “lead” or “plumb,” but most scholars today believe that the word means “tin.”

7:10-17 Amos then gives a biographical illustration of the corrupt power structure and the leaders’ desire to silence the word of Yahweh. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam II (793-753 BC) that made it sound like Amos was threatening a revolt against Jeroboam II and the destruction of Israel. Amaziah told Amos to leave Israel and go to Judah. Amos responded and told Amaziah that he could not because Yahweh gave him this commission and that he must be obedient to Him. Amos then prophesied against Amaziah that his family would be ruined and scattered in the coming judgment. And Yahweh commanded Amos to not stop prophesying against Israel.

8:1-2 Yahweh showed Amos a fourth vision of a basket of summer fruit. Yahweh promised to bring ruin to the people and turn all their celebration into misery. The Hebrew word *qayits* (“ripe fruit”) sounds like *qets* (“end”) and foreshadows Israel’s end.

8:3-14 Yahweh then declared that He was bringing darkness and judgment on Israel. There would be no food and no safe place to hide, and even the young and strong would fall.

9:1-10 In the fifth vision, Amos saw Yahweh standing by an altar, which was probably the altar in Bethel. Yahweh came in the whirlwind of dark storm clouds and struck the tops of the pillars with His lightning. Yahweh then covered Israel in the chaotic waters of the sea and brought ruin to Israel.

9:11-15 Amos closes his book with a message of hope of restoration. Amos portrayed Israel as a rebuilt house (“restore David’s fallen shelter”). The idea is that the royal line of David would be returned to Israel and would rebuild the household of Yahweh’s people in the Promised Land. Yahweh would then restore the land so that it would once again produce an abundance of wine and crops. The image is of the Promised Land not only being restored back to what it was but becoming even more than it had ever been. It would become the “Garden of Eden” that Yahweh had intended it to become. This idea will be developed further in the following prophets.

Hosea

Hosea was a pre-Assyrian prophet who ministered to Israel (northern kingdom) during 767–700 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC) of Israel, and the reigns of Uzziah (792–740 BC), Jotham (750–735 BC), Ahaz (735–719 BC), and Hezekiah (715–698 BC) of Judah. The main idea of the book of Hosea is Yahweh's condemnation of Israel's adulterous unfaithfulness through idolatry but also His promise to heal and save them.

The book appears to be an anthology of speeches rather than a tightly structured collection. The book is arranged in four divisions. In the first, Yahweh illustrates Israel's unfaithfulness through Hosea's marriage (Hos. 1:1-3:5). In the last three, Yahweh brings lawsuits against Israel's sins and violation of the covenant (Hos. 4:1-6:3; 6:4-11:11; 11:12-14:9).

Israel's Sin Is Illustrated (1:1-3:5)

In this division Yahweh told Hosea to marry Gomer, who would end up pursuing an adulterous lifestyle. Yahweh used her adultery in their marriage to illustrate Israel's idolatry despite their covenant with Yahweh. By setting Israel's sinful behavior in the context of prostitution, Hosea emphasized the seriousness of their sin and how it destroys lives. Hosea's faithfulness to Gomer and continuous restoration of her also illustrated Yahweh's faithfulness to reconcile and restore Israel one day.

1:1-3 Yahweh called Hosea to marry an “adulterous wife” and have children by her. The phrase “adulterous wife” does not describe her status at the time but rather what she would end up becoming. Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife was to be an illustration of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh (Hos. 2:2; 4:12; 5:4). The children being called “children of unfaithfulness” refers not to their unfaithfulness but their mother's unfaithfulness. It should read as “children born to a mother of unfaithfulness.”⁹ Does this mean that they did not belong to Hosea? It is not clear from the context. The first child belonged to Hosea, but Gomer's actions call into suspicion who the father(s) of the second and third children were.

1:4-5 Yahweh commanded Hosea to name his first child Jezreel, for he would be a testimony to the fact that Yahweh was going to punish the house of Jehu and Israel for the bloodshed that Jehu committed when he exterminated the house of Ahab in Jezreel (2 Kgs. 9-10). The proper name “Jezreel” (*yizre'el*) sounds like “Israel” (*yisra'el*). This phonetic wordplay associates the sin at Jezreel with the judgment on Israel, stressing poetic justice.

1:6-7 Hosea was to name his second child Lo-Ruhamah, which means “not loved,” to illustrate that Yahweh was no longer to show love and covenant blessings to Israel because of their sins. Yet He would show love and covenant blessings to Judah because of their repentance. He would save only Judah from the coming Assyrians, not by their military but by His own hand in order to demonstrate His power.

1:8-9 Hosea was to name the third child Lo-Amm, which means “not my people,” because Yahweh was going to reject Israel as His covenant people.

1:10-2:1 Yet Yahweh promised to restore Israel back to the Promised Land, and they would be known as “children of the living God.” Israel would no longer be a divided nation but would be united with Judah under one Davidic king (Hos. 3:5). It would be a great day in Jezreel. Jezreel

⁹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 337.

would no longer be known for its bloodshed and judgment but by what its name actually means, “God plants.” Yahweh portrayed the future Israelites returning to the land as brothers and sisters, the children of the current generation of adulterous Israel. These future children were to be called “my people” and “my loved one.” This name reversal gives hope that Israel would be renewed and restored to the Promised Land one day.

2:2-13 Yahweh now spoke as the husband of the current generation of Israel to His children, who are the future restored Israelites. He called His future children of Israel to rebuke their mother, who was the current generation of Israelites. They were to rebuke her for her adultery and to call her to purify herself. If she did not, then He would strip her naked and expose her and take away His blessings. Yahweh only warns because He does not want to punish. And by warning Israel over and over again He shows that He is not rash in His judgment.

Yahweh’s threat to not show love to her children (Hos. 2:4-5a) was more for shock because He had already said that He was going to restore her children (Hos. 2:1). Yahweh would block her adulterous path so that she could not pursue her lovers anymore and would come back to Him. Her desires had caused her to forget about how Yahweh had blessed her—blessings she had given away to her adulterous lover Baal.

2:9-13 Therefore, Yahweh would take away her grain and wine. He would take back His wool and linen so that she would be exposed in her nakedness and sin. He would rob her of her celebrations and joy and ruin her wine that she gave to her lovers. She had adorned herself for other lovers and had forgotten Yahweh her husband.

2:14-23 Yahweh would one day allure her, speak tenderly to her, and bring her to the wilderness where He first came to her (Ex. 14-19). Then He would bring her back to their home in the Promised Land and restore her wine. She would no longer call him “master” (*ba’li*) but “husband” (*’ishi*). Though referring to one’s husband as master in the ancient Near East was common, it had a negative connotation. Calling Yahweh “master” (*ba’li*) might bring back negative memories since her former lover had been Baal (“master”).¹⁰ Yahweh would remove the names of her lovers from her lips. This also communicates a more intimate relationship in the future. Yahweh would make a new covenant with her that would last forever, remove all war from the land, and give Israel the ability to be faithful forever. Yahweh would plant Himself in the land and restore her grain, wine, and olive oil.

3:1-5 In the autobiographical account of Hosea, Yahweh told him to take his wife Gomer back even though she had been unfaithful to him with many lovers. She had strayed so far that she had become enslaved to others. This would have only been possible on a legal level if she had actually left him in a divorce or was living with her father (Lev. 22:13; Judg. 19:2). Hosea was to love her as Yahweh loved Israel despite their idolatry. So, Hosea bought her from her slavery, brought her into his home, and told her that she was to remain faithful as he would be to her.

Yahweh was going to let Israel live many years without a home, king, or sacrifices so that they would yearn for what they had with Yahweh. Then they would return and seek out Yahweh and their Davidic king and receive Yahweh’s blessing. The Davidic king should be understood as the ideal Davidic king of the future who is seen as the coming “David” (Mic. 5:2; Isa. 11:1-10; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). This “David” carries out the same functions as the messianic king.

¹⁰ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 344.

Yahweh's Lawsuit for No Knowledge of Yahweh (4:1-6:3)

The remaining messages continue to expound on the themes introduced in the first division (Hos. 1:1-3:5). They all focus on Israel's guilt and the coming judgment but all conclude on a positive note promising restoration. In this division Yahweh specifically condemns Israel for behaving as if they had no knowledge of who Yahweh is and His character.

4:1-10 Yahweh moves from the metaphor of the adulterous wife and rebukes Israel directly. He rebukes them for their lack of faithfulness and acknowledgement of Yahweh. They have filled the land with cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, and broken covenants. Thus, the land dries up and is barren.

4:4-9 Even the priests and the prophets had become corrupted with evil and were feeding on the people. The more the priests increased in number, the more the corruption spread. In contrast, their presence should have reduced wickedness and increased righteousness. So, Yahweh would destroy them and reject them as His priests because they had rejected Yahweh and His law.

4:10-14 Yahweh then condemned Israel for their pagan fertility rites in which they would go to the altars of the pagan gods and engage in "sacred" prostitution, which were meant to increase the fertility of the land. These rituals involved drinking, sex, divination, and sacrifices. The Israelites encouraged their daughters to visit these shrines in hopes that the gods would bless them with many children. The fathers were also condemned, for they also visited the shrines and had sex with the priestesses to increase their virility.

4:15-19 Yahweh warned Judah to not become corrupted like Israel. Israel was so stubborn that no matter how many times they were judged and repented, they kept returning to their sinful ways. Thus, the whirlwind of Yahweh would sweep them away in a greater judgment of exile.

5:1-3 Yahweh condemned the priests, who were supposed to lead Israel in righteousness but instead led them in idolatry and corrupted many Israelite cities with their pagan shrines. Ephraim was one of the twelve tribes of Israel whose name was sometimes used to refer to the northern kingdom of Israel. Ephraim had turned to prostitution and corrupted all of Israel.

5:4-7 Once again, Yahweh pointed out that their hearts were so corrupted that they were not able to turn back to Yahweh. Even if they tried to seek Him, they would not find Him because He had withdrawn from them due to their unfaithfulness.

5:8-12 The trumpets of the invading Assyrian army from the north would be heard all throughout the land. Yahweh would pour out His wrath on the land like a flood. After Israel, Judah would be next, for they acted unjustly—as one who moves boundary stones in order to wrongly gain more land.

5:13-15 When Assyria began to move against Israel, Israel responded by making a treaty with them. This could refer to the pro-Assyrian policies of King Menahem (752–742 BC) or King Hoshea (732–722 BC). However, Assyria would not be able to cure Israel, and Yahweh would pounce on them like a lion (Hos. 5:13-19).

6:1-3 Hosea called Israel to return to Yahweh, who, though He had punished them, would also heal them. They were to seek Him out so they could be healed like the rain heals the land.

Yahweh's Lawsuit for Lack of Devotion to Yahweh (6:4-11:11)

This division contains another series of messages that deal with the coming judgment on Israel and the restoration that will follow. There are three major addresses in this section, each introduced by a direct address (Hos. 6:4; 9:1; 11:8).

6:4-11a Yahweh was upset with Ephraim(another name for the northern kingdom of Israel) and Judah because the love they had promised to Yahweh never lasted long. Therefore, Yahweh rebuked them harshly through His prophets and word for all of their lack of mercy and their evil ways.

6:11b-7:7 Lying and stealing was the next sin that Yahweh condemned. Yahweh condemned the kings of Israel for their assassination of the previous kings. From 752 to 732 BC, four of Israel's kings were assassinated (2 Kgs. 15). The conspirators typically carried out their assassinations during a festival, while the king was drunk. Yahweh compares them to a smoldering oven that is stoked right at the moment that they take the king's life (Hos. 7:3-7). None of them looked to Yahweh for their national security.

7:8-16 They also went to the other nations and made treaties with them, especially with Egypt. They even made a treaty with Assyria, who was being sent by Yahweh to destroy them (Hos. 7:8-16). They are ignorant of the true sovereign God and do not turn to Him for help. Yahweh longed to redeem them, but Israel did not cry out to Him for help.

8:1-6 Yahweh announced that the mighty eagle (symbolizing Assyria) was circling over Israel, ready to swoop down and take them into captivity (Deut. 28:49). Israel cried out to Yahweh, but they did not get rid of their idols, they rejected what was good, and they appointed kings without Yahweh's approval. They even recreated the golden calf of Egypt and worshiped it (Ex. 32; 1 Kgs. 12:25-33). Yahweh would smash and destroy the abhorrent idol (2 Kgs. 23).

8:7-10 Thus, Yahweh was going to sweep them away in His whirlwind of judgment (Ps. 83:15; Isa. 29:6). The land would no longer produce grain and wine, and they would be swallowed and lost among the nations. In captivity to Assyria, they would lose their uniqueness from all the nations and begin to waste away.

8:11-14 Despite Israel's idolatry and alliances with foreign nations, they had the audacity to continue offering sacrifices to Yahweh. But because they rejected the law of Yahweh and were hypocrites, He had rejected their worship and sacrifices. They had forgotten their Maker, and so he would burn their cities with fire. Because Judah was beginning to decline like Israel, eventually Yahweh's judgment would overflow into Judah as well.

9:1-4 Yahweh warned Israel not to be joyful and celebrate as if life were good, for they had been unfaithful like a prostitute, prostituting themselves to the gods for grain at the threshing floors. Yet Yahweh would take away their grain and wine and return them to slavery. Yahweh was not going to return them to the literal Egypt; rather, Egypt is a symbol of the slavery and oppression Assyria was going to bring (Hos. 9:3). Yahweh would turn their sacrifices from celebration to mourning.

9:5-9 They would no longer celebrate at the festivals of Yahweh, for their punishment was coming. "Egypt" (Assyria) was going to gather them up into destruction. Their treasure and homes would be replaced by thorns and briers. This was happening because their sins were many. They had even considered the prophets of Yahweh fools. These prophets were the covenant watchmen, and yet they ensnared them and killed them. Judgment was coming.

9:10-14 Yahweh had not always found Israel repulsive in their sin. In fact, when He first found them and came to them in the desert after their exodus, He looked upon them with the delight of finding grapes and figs in the desert. But when they worshiped Baal at Baal Peor in order to receive fertility for children (Num. 25), they became repulsive to Yahweh. Thus, Ephraim's glory would fly away like a bird, and they would no longer produce children, for Yahweh would make their women barren. Ironically, the name "Ephraim," which means "doubly fruitful," would not produce any fruit.

9:15-17 Because of their wickedness, Yahweh rejected His covenant people. The word "hate" here does not communicate emotions but is covenantal language of rejection. Yahweh would drive them from the land, and they would become like a withered, pulled-up root.

10:1-2 Yahweh remembered Israel's early prosperity as she spread out across the Promised Land like a vine (Ps. 80:8-11; Ezek. 19:10-11). But then the vine produced good fruit they built false altars and their hearts became deceitful. Their altars were a testimony to their guilt and would be destroyed. They should have given glory top Yahweh for giving them prosperity.

10:3-8 They would be left without a king to lead and protect them. Yet Yahweh stated that even if they had a king, he would not be able to do anything for them, for Yahweh is the only true king. Under their kings, they made false oaths and sued each other, becoming poison in the land. They cared more about their idol and feared its demise more than they cared about others and their fate. Therefore, their high places and idols would be destroyed.

10:9-15 Since the moment they entered the Promised Land, they committed horrid sins in Gibeah (Judg. 19). Just as war overtook Gibeah, so it would overtake them since they had not changed. Yahweh would allow Assyria to put a yoke on Ephraim and drive her from the land.

Yahweh then pleaded with them to sow righteousness instead of wickedness in the land so that they might live. But they did not listen and sowed wickedness instead. Just as Shalman ruthlessly devasted Beth Arbel, so they would be devastated by the Assyrians. Scholars have not been able to find any reference in extrabiblical literature to this event in the Bible.

11:1-4 Yahweh joyfully recalls Israel's history and refers to them here as His son. But the more Yahweh called to them, the more they ran away and went to the Baals. But it was Yahweh, not Baal, who taught Israel righteousness ("to walk"), led them by the hands, and showed affection to them.

11:5-11 Yahweh was heartbroken knowing that He had to punish them with Assyria, but they constantly turned away from Him. There is a word play here—where Israel refused to "repent" (*shub*, "return"), so they would "return" (*shub*) to bondage. Yahweh mourned Ephraim's coming judgment and could not bear to "overturn" (*haphak*) them in His judgment as He'd had to "overturn" (*haphak*, Gen. 19:25) the cities of Admah and Zeboym in His judgment (Deut. 29:23). When Yahweh saw His child being punished, His heart was "turned" (*haphak*) to compassion.¹¹ He would not punish Ephraim with blind rage; He would stop short of annihilating them because, unlike humans, He is not controlled by His emotions.

¹¹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 362.

“The distinction between God and human beings does not lie in some supposed absence of divine emotion, but in God’s ability to control his emotions and express them appropriately.”¹²

Yahweh then promised that one day He would roar like a lion calling His children back to Himself, and those who recognize His voice would come back from exile and settle back into their land. Despite Israel’s sin, Yahweh refused to divorce and abandon Israel because of His love, compassion, and faithfulness to Israel.

Yahweh’s Lawsuit for Deceitfulness (11:12-14:9)

In this division Yahweh condemns Israel for their deceiving of their own people for their own gain. Yet there is exhortation to turn to Yahweh and do better. The division ends with a promise of restoration.

11:12-12:8 Yahweh returned to the harsh present, where Israelites were lying and deceiving even their own people. Yahweh compared their deceitfulness to feeding on the wind, which would lead to starvation. Israel, just like their father Jacob, has been deceitful from the very beginning (Gen. 25:26; 32:22-32). Yahweh pleaded with Israel to return to Him.

12:9-14 Yahweh has been their God from their inception, when they came out of Egypt. Yet because of their sins they would be driven back into the wilderness where they came from. If Israel thought they were immune to exile, they should consider the experience of Jacob, who, after he had been chosen by Yahweh, was then driven by Yahweh from the land. Yahweh used a prophet to bring them out of the desert, but now they angered Yahweh, for they had responded to His gracious act with their bloodshed.

13:1-3 Ephraim used to command respect but then turned to Baal worship and died. This statement is ironic because Baal was supposed to promote life and fertility. They sinned, made idols, and offered human sacrifices. Therefore, they would pass away as quickly as they came, just like the morning mist, early dew, chaff, and smoke.

13:4-13 But unlike the pagan gods, Yahweh has been their God and cared for them since they came out of Egypt. Yahweh fed them, and they were satisfied. But they had become proud and forgotten Yahweh. So Yahweh would devour them like a lion, leopard, and bear robbed of her cubs. No king of Israel could protect Israel from the Assyrians, whom Yahweh was sending. This is ironic because Israel wanted a king, like all the other nations, to protect them (1 Sam. 8:4-5, 19-20). Ephraim was lost after abandoning Yahweh and now produced children without wisdom.

13:14-16 Yahweh personified death as an instrument of judgment against Israel. The NIV makes it sound like a promise of deliverance, but this understanding is very unlikely in the surrounding context. The two statements in Hos. 13:14a should be understood as rhetorical questions with a negative reply. And the two statements that follow are an invitation to death to do its work, as seen in the New English Translation (NET) below.

“Will I deliver them from the power of Sheol? No, I will not!
Will I redeem them from death? No, I will not!
O Death, bring on your plagues!
O Sheol, bring on your destruction!”

¹² Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 362.

Yahweh would not show them compassion, and a whirlwind from the east would come and destroy them. The springs and well would dry up, and the storehouses would be plundered. Israel must bear its guilt for they have rebelled against their God. They would die horrible deaths, like those they had inflicted on others.

14:1-2 The horrible massacre previously described fades to the background as Yahweh looks to the future and calls Israel to return to Him from exile. Yahweh called them to repent of their sins so that they could be forgiven. This involved not going to other nations for protection and giving up their idols.

14:3-9 Yahweh promised to heal them of their proneness to wander away from Him and promised to love them, for His anger has died away. Yahweh would restore the land, and Israel would put its roots deep into the soil like a cedar tree. Yahweh called those who are discerning and wise to understand the righteous way of Yahweh and walk in His righteousness.

Micah

Micah was a pre-Assyrian prophet who ministered to Judah (southern kingdom) during 750–700 BC, during the reigns of Jotham (750–735 BC), Ahaz (735–719 BC), and Hezekiah (715–698 BC) of Judah. The main idea of the book of Micah is his condemnation of Judah for their violation of the Mosaic covenant and his calling them to covenant loyalty.

The book appears to be an anthology of speeches rather than a tightly structured collection. Though Micah's messages were primarily directed toward Judah, there were times he addressed Israel. Judah is addressed in the second person while Israel is addressed in the third person. The book is divided into three oracles that begin with the word "hear/listen" (*shama'*) and end with a promise of restoration (Mic. 1:1-2:13; 3:1-5:15; 6:1-7:20).

Israel's Impending Judgment and Future Restoration (1:2-2:13)

In this division Yahweh condemns Judah for their sins but ends with a brief hope of restoration.

1:1-7 Micah was from Moresheth-gath, which was a Judean town in the Shephelah foothills of Judah, southwest of Jerusalem. With the word "hear" (*shama'*) Micah summons the first court case against Judah. The sovereign Yahweh was the judge who would rule over them. Yahweh came down to judge Israel, just as He had come down to judge Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19). Despite all the strength and splendor of the mountains, they could not support the awesomeness of Yahweh's glory. Micah, as well as other prophets, referred to Israel by the name Jacob (Mic. 2:7, 12; 3:1, 8, 9; 4:2; 5:7, 8). This name evokes the deceiving Jacob, who was not trusting in Yahweh, before Yahweh changed his name to Israel (Gen. 32:22-32). Because of Israel's sins, Yahweh would turn Samaria into a heap of stones. In the ancient Near East, when an invading army defeated a city, they would ruin it by pushing the wall at the top of the hill outward so the stones would roll down into the valley, making it harder to rebuild the city. Yahweh would also crush and burn the idols they trusted in for security.

1:8-16 Micah then moved on to Judah, lamenting that Israel's sins had infected Judah as well. He went around naked (maybe with a loincloth) and wailed in the streets for Judah's sins. People of the ancient Near East would sit in the dust with torn clothes and sometimes shave their heads when they were in mourning. Micah listed all the great cities of Judah that would be destroyed when judgment came.

2:1-5 The word "woe" (*hoy*) was used when mourning the dead. The greedy had plotted to take land and inheritances from others because they had power to oppress them, and now Yahweh was plotting against them. The Hebrew word used to describe the "evil" (*ra'*) they planned is almost identical to the word used of the "disaster" (*ra'ah*) Yahweh was planning for them. They would be brought down low from the heights of their pride and would be ridiculed as they lay in ruin and their belongings were divided among others, just as they done to others.

2:6-11 The people of Judah told Yahweh's prophets to stop speaking of judgment, for they were convinced that Yahweh would never bring His people to ruin. Yahweh reminded them that He rewards only those who are obedient. He does not reward those who strip others of their belongings, drive them from their homes, and take away the blessings of Yahweh.

2:12-13 Yahweh then ended the oracle with a promise that He would regather His people from exile back to the land and pasture of His protection and blessing. The king and Yahweh would together lead the people.

The Guilt of Israel's Leaders and Her Future Hope (3:1-5:15)

In this division the balance of emphasis is different, switching from a focus on judgment to restoration. About one-third deals with present sins (Mic. 3) and two-thirds with future blessings (Mic. 4-5).

3:1-4 With the word “hear” (*shama’*) Micah summons the second court case against Judah. Yahweh condemned the leaders of Judah and compared their cruel and oppressive deeds to cannibalism. One day they would cry out for help just as their victims had, but Yahweh would not rescue them.

3:5-8 Yahweh then condemned the false prophets who led His people away from Him. They gave positive oracles in the name of “Yahweh” for the right price. But there would be no peace, only war. Therefore, the prophets would lose their gift and be publicly disgraced. In contrast, Micah was filled with the power of the Spirit of Yahweh because he declared the message of Yahweh.

3:9-12 Yahweh condemned the leaders again for despising justice and making money off of the oppression of others. The prophets thought they could give any message they wanted for money and then expect the support of Yahweh. Therefore, Zion would be plowed like a field—but for weeds not crops. Zion was the spiritual name for the city of Jerusalem, where Yahweh dwelt in the temple.

4:1-5 In contrast to the moral decay to which Judah had turned the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, Yahweh would establish His true temple on His cosmic mountain that is higher than all other temples, and true worshipers would stream into it. Not just Israel but many nations would also come to the cosmic mountain of Yahweh. His true temple would be the focus of all the world. Then all of them would obey the law of Yahweh and walk in His ways. Yahweh would justly judge the nations, and there would be no need for war, so all would beat their swords and spears into plowshares and pruning hooks. They would build a new Garden of Eden where everyone would have their own vineyard, be satisfied, and live without fear.

4:6-8 Not only would Yahweh gather the nations to His new Zion, but He would also bring in the lame, who were considered cursed by the gods and culturally inferior. All people will be accepted on Mount Zion, and Yahweh will rule over them forever. Their dominion and kingship will be restored.

4:9-13 Yahweh then asked why Judah cried out in pain—where was their king to answer their cries? The idea is that their king, who was merely human, could not save them, but Yahweh, whom they had rejected, could. So now they writhed in agony and would go into exile. But it is there that Yahweh, their true king, would hear their cries and rescue them. But until then, many nations surrounded Judah, thinking Judah would be forever destroyed. But they did not know the plans of Yahweh and how He would use Judah’s exile not to destroy them but to lead them back to Him and restore them. Yahweh would then give Judah horns of iron (symbol of power) and hooves of bronze (symbol of judgment), and they would trample the nations and rule over them.

5:1-3 In Mic. 4:7b Micah pictured Yahweh ruling from Zion, but here it becomes clear that Yahweh would exercise His rule through a human king, who is depicted as another David. They would strike the king on the cheek, but out of the most insignificant town of Bethlehem would come a great ruler whose origins are of old. This phrase “origins of old, from ancient times” is

used to refer to Israel's ancient history (Isa. 45:21; 46:10; Hab. 1:12).¹³ The idea of a king who rules on Yahweh's behalf goes back to the beginning of Israel's establishment (Gen. 49:8-12; Num. 24:15-19). Therefore, Israel would be abandoned by Yahweh until she was ready to give birth to this new king.

5:4-15 This Davidic king will stand as a true shepherd over Judah in Yahweh's strength, and the people will live in security, for His dominion will cover all the earth. He will defend the people of Yahweh when the enemies come to attack and destroy. This is not a reemergence of the Assyrian empire but an archetype of the future nations that seek to attack the kingdom of Yahweh. The remnant of Jacob will be among all the nations, like rain showers or the strong lion, unable to be stopped. The point of both of these metaphors is that the remnant would become a mighty nation whose enemies would be unable to resist its power.¹⁴ In that day of the new Zion, Yahweh will destroy all the chariots, cities, witchcraft, idols, and sacred stones—all the things humanity puts before Yahweh and depends on for success and safety.

Yahweh's Case Against Israel and the Ultimate Triumph of His Kingdom (6:1-7:20)

This division contains one final announcement of judgment on Judah for their sins (Mic. 6) and then a promise of future restoration (Mic. 7).

6:1-8 With the word "hear" (*shama'*) Micah summons the third court case against Judah. Yahweh called creation to be His witness in His case against Israel. Once again, Yahweh reminded Israel of how He had brought them out of their slavery in Egypt (Ex. 14), delivered them from Balak the king of the Moabites (Num. 22-24), and brought them to the Promised Land that they might know who the true and righteous Yahweh is.

Micah then asked what one could bring the sovereign king and creator of universe as a sacrifice, for He needs nothing. The Israelites would have thought sacrifices. Today one would think a passionate worship service or working within the church. Micah rejected this and reminded them that Yahweh had already revealed His desire in His law. Before all else Yahweh wanted His people to actively promote justice, to devote themselves to the good of others, and to humbly submit themselves to Yahweh in true devotion. The Hebrew word translated "mercy" refers more broadly to "loyalty, faithfulness, devotion." The emphasis is seen in "love mercy," for devotion to others is proof of one's submission to Yahweh and the basis for a just and healthy society.¹⁵ To "love loyalty" means one is passionate and seeks the good of others. All Yahweh requires is that one reflect His character and redeem others as He does. This is the heart of what it means to be a true human.

6:9-16 Judah was called to stand in respect and awe of Yahweh, for this would bring them true wisdom. Thus, they would heed Yahweh's rebuke and repent. Yahweh asked Judah if they truly expected Him to forgive their social injustice, violence, and lying without repentance. Therefore, He was going to destroy them and strip their land of everything.

7:1-7 Yahweh compared Himself to one who goes out into the orchards and vineyards to gather fruit, yet the trees and vines are barren. So it was with Israel: they were His people but were bearing no fruit. The faithful no longer existed in the land of Judah, and all those who were left

¹³ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 423.

¹⁴ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 424.

¹⁵ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 425.

sought to ambush others for their own gain. The rulers and judges demanded bribes, and the powerful did what benefited themselves. Judah was no better than the briars and thorn bushes. They had become a people among whom no one could trust another. Micah then declared that he trusted no one except for Yahweh, who would save him.

7:8-13 Micah spoke as if he were Israel in exile. Israel warned her enemies to not gloat over her, for she would rise again into the light of Yahweh even though she currently sat in the darkness. She would sit in Yahweh's judgment until He saw fit to restore her. Then her enemies would see her and be filled with shame, for they would see Yahweh in mighty action even though they once doubted His power. The day for rebuilding Jerusalem and its walls would come, for Israel would return from captivity in Assyria.

7:14-20 Micah then called for Yahweh to be a shepherd to His people as He once was, when He brought Israel out of Egypt. Then the nations would be filled with shame and be shocked at the mighty deeds and love of Yahweh. There is no God like Yahweh, who forgives sins and restores the inheritance of the remnant. Yahweh's anger is short lived, and His mercy is unending. He would remove Israel's sins, for He is faithful to His covenant promises to Abraham and Jacob. Yahweh would restore Israel, not because they were worthy of restoration but because of His character and His promises to Israel.

Isaiah

Isaiah was a pre-Assyrian prophet who ministered to Judah (southern kingdom) during 740–681 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC) of Israel and Uzziah (792–740 BC) of Judah. The main idea of the book of Isaiah is that Yahweh, as the sovereign and holy One of Israel, will burn Israel in a purifying fire to create a new Jerusalem.

The book of Isaiah is divided into two parts. The first half (Isa. 1-39) reflects for the most part the concerns and sociopolitical realities of Isaiah's day. This part is arranged in four divisions (Isa. 1:1-12:6; 13:1-27:13; 28:1-35:10; 36:1-39:8). The second half (Isa. 40-66) anticipates the exile and addresses the concerns of the future exiles of Babylon. It seeks to convince them that Yahweh is actively involved in their lives and wants to deliver them from exile and establish a new era in Israel's history. This part is arranged in two parts (Isa. 40:1-55:13; 56:1-66:24).

Restoration after Judgment (1:1-12:6)

The first division of Isaiah blends announcements of judgment with descriptions of a future time where Israel would be restored and justice and peace would fill the earth. Yahweh begins with accusations and judgments (Isa. 1:1-8:22) and then ends with hope of restoration (Isa. 9:1-12:6).

1:1-20 In 722 BC the Assyrian army sacked Israel (northern kingdom) and deported them into exile. In 701 BC the Assyrian army invaded and destroyed the crops of Judah (southern kingdom) and besieged Jerusalem. In response to Hezekiah's prayer, Yahweh delivered Jerusalem and drove the Assyrian army back home (2 Kgs. 18:17-20:21; Isa. 36-37). In the aftermath of this invasion, Yahweh confronted Judah with their rebellion and issued an ultimatum. This prophecy of judgment against Jerusalem is recorded in Isa. 1-6.

Isa. 1 begins with a courtroom scene in which the heavens and earth are witnesses to Israel's covenantal agreement to obey Yahweh. Yahweh now condemns Israel's violation of this covenant and warns of the coming judgment for violating the covenant they agreed to (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1). He accused Israel of rebellion and ingratitude. Even the brutish animals (the ox and donkey) recognize their master and where their food comes from. But Israel refused to acknowledge Yahweh as the source of their blessings. Yahweh does not tolerate rebellion.

Yahweh mourned ("woe") for the coming judgment on Judah, for they had rejected the Holy One of Israel. The "Holy One of Israel" is one of Isaiah's favorite titles for Yahweh. It pictures Yahweh as the sovereign king of creation who exercises moral authority over His creation and His covenant people (Isa. 6).¹⁶ Yahweh had already begun to punish Judah, and they were battered from the punishment. Yahweh asked them how much longer they would endure punishment before they repented.

Yahweh referred to them as Sodom and Gomorrah and condemned them for their sacrifices offered to Him. Without their obedience, their sacrifices made Him sick.

Yahweh called them to cleanse themselves of their sins and do what was right by seeking justice and to improve the lives of those who were oppressed. Yahweh declared that it was not too late for them and promised that He would cleanse them of their sins if they repented and obeyed

¹⁶ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 16.

Him. If they chose to be obedient, they would experience life to the fullest, but if they rebelled, they would be destroyed and experience death.

1:21-31 At one time, Judah's leadership promoted justice (1 Kgs. 3:7-12, 16-28; 10:9; 2 Chr. 19:5-10), but now they were concerned only with wealth and ignored the plights of the most vulnerable in society. Therefore, Yahweh would turn against them and purify them of their idols, which would restore the just leaders back to Israel. In Israel's restoration the righteous would be restored and the wicked would perish. Those who worshiped idols would be filled with shame and would fade away.

2:1-5 Yahweh declared that a day was coming when He would establish His cosmic mountain as the highest point in all the earth. Many people from all the nations, not just Israel, will come up to the mountain of Yahweh and live there. Yahweh will teach them and enable them to live righteously according to His law. He will personally judge His people's enemies and bring peace. There will be no more war, and all will beat their swords and spears into plowshares and pruning hooks. This vision depicts a day when all of human society is transformed.

2:6-22 Yahweh had abandoned Israel because they had pursued divination and wealth and bowed down to idols. Isa. 2:9a should be understood as the people bowing down and humbling themselves to idols rather than the people being brought low and being humbled in judgment.¹⁷ So Yahweh told them to run to the caves and hide, for He was coming and would bring every high place in the land down in rubble.

3:1-15 Yahweh was going to take away all the supplies and support of every leader in the nation and bring them down to the level of mere youths. Yahweh would bring such a catastrophe upon them that everyone would turn against each other in the chaos. Yet Yahweh promised that He would take care of the righteous in the midst of His judgment. The root of the nation's problem was the corruption of the leadership who led the people.

3:16-4:1 The wives and daughters of Jerusalem's wealthy would not be protected by the coming judgment. These women became wealthy from their husbands' and fathers' oppression of the people, and they were proud of their wealth and jewelry. Yahweh would strip their finery away from them just as they had done to the poor. All the men in their lives would be killed, and they would desperately beg the male survivors to marry them.

4:2-6 Some see the "the branch" here as a reference to the messiah, like in other places in the prophetic books (Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). In those other places, there is a clear contextual connection made between the "the branch" and a human ruler. However, in this case there is none, and "the branch" is connected to the "fruit of the land" (Num. 13:20, 26; Deut. 1:25).¹⁸ After Yahweh's judgment, the Israelites would return to the land, and it would provide a great abundance of grain and fruit for them. Yahweh would purify the men and women of the land, and He would dwell with them as a canopy of fire and smoke.

5:1-7 Isaiah begins with a love song offered by the covenant people of Yahweh. The people are portrayed as a vineyard that belongs to Yahweh, who lovingly tended to the vineyard. But then Yahweh interrupted the song with His judgment on the vineyard, which did not produce good

¹⁷ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 19.

¹⁸ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 21.

grapes. As a result, He would bring sour grapes of bloodshed since there were no good grapes of righteousness to be found on the vine.

5:8-30 Yahweh of hosts (army) condemned Judah for their social injustice (Isa. 5:8, 23), carousing (Isa. 5:11-12a, 22,), and spiritual insensitivity (Isa. 5:12b, 18-21). In the first woe Yahweh condemned the leaders for building large houses and accumulating lands at the expense of the poor (Isa. 5:8-10). Their actions violated the covenant, which said that the land ultimately belonged to Yahweh and that only He could distribute land allotments. Thus, they would never reap the crops of their lands. The second woe condemned the wealthy leaders for their excessive lifestyle and for spending most of their time going to parties and getting drunk (Isa. 5:11-17). Thus, they would be brought down when they were taken into captivity. Woes three through five condemned the leaders for culturally redefining right and wrong and sarcastically challenging Yahweh to bring His judgment down on Judah. (Isa. 5:18-21). In the sixth woe Yahweh condemned the leaders for their social injustices (Isa. 5:22-25a). Thus, Yahweh whistled for the Assyrians to come like an attack dog to pounce on Judah for their sins.

6:1-13 The book of Isaiah moves back in time from 701 BC to 730 BC, when Isaiah was first commissioned by Yahweh to be a prophet. King Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) had been expanding the Assyrian Empire and had not yet sacked and deported Israel (northern kingdom), which would happen in 722 BC. It is eight years before the sacking of Israel that Isaiah is commissioned by Yahweh to be His prophet.

Isaiah saw a vision of Yahweh, the true King, sitting on His throne. The train of His robe, which was a symbol of glory and power, filled His entire temple. Winged seraphs (meaning “the fiery ones”) surrounded Him, declaring His holiness. The threefold mention of the word *holy* emphasizes His transcendent sovereignty over all things in creation. In Hebrew, to repeat a word gives emphasis to the word. Like in Isa. 26:3, the word *peace* is repeated to emphasize the security that Yahweh would provide for His people. Similarly, we see repetition of the word *ruin* in Ezek. 21:27.

Standing in the divine council of Yahweh¹⁹, Isaiah immediately felt as if he was doomed to judgment since he was a sinner who came from an unclean people and was standing in the presence of the righteous king over creation. Then one of the seraphs took a coal from the heavenly altar and cleansed Isaiah’s lips, for it was from there that the word of Yahweh would issue forth. Yahweh then asked His council who would go to Judah on their behalf. Isaiah volunteered. Yahweh then told him to deliver a message that the people would hear and see but never understand or respond to. The more they heard the message of Yahweh, the more their hearts would become calloused, and they would become stubborn and unwilling to repent. Isaiah asked how long he should preach. Yahweh responded until Judah is destroyed. Even if the population were reduced to a tenth of its original size, Yahweh would continue to destroy them.

7:1-9 In 735 BC, five years after Isaiah’s prophetic commissioning, he found himself thrown into an international political crisis. Ahaz (735–719 BC) king of Judah, the grandson of Uzziah (792–740 BC), had joined his father Jotham (750–735 BC) as co-regent over Judah. King Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) had been expanding the Assyrian empire for the last decade. Aram (Syria) and Israel had formed an alliance to prevent the Assyrians from overtaking them. When Ahaz refused to join the anti-Assyrian coalition, Rezin king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel

¹⁹ See Cory Baugher. *The Divine Council of Yahweh*, at www.knowingthebible.net/topics/the-divine-council-of-yahweh.

marched to Jerusalem in hopes of replacing Ahaz with a puppet king called the “son of Tabeel” (Isa. 7:6). With the coming of the armies of Aram and Israel, Judah was filled with fear. Yahweh instructed Isaiah (translated as “Yahweh saves”) to take his son Shear-jashub (“a remnant will return”) and speak to Ahaz at the Upper Pool, where he was inspecting the city’s defenses, and assure Ahaz of Yahweh’s protection (Isa. 7:3), for the enemy was merely smoldering sticks. Isaiah called Ahaz and his government to trust in Yahweh. If they did not “stand” firm in their faith, then they would not “stand” at all (Isa. 7:9).

7:10-25 To assure Ahaz, Yahweh then told Isaiah that Ahaz could ask any sign from Yahweh to confirm His promise. But Ahaz, who had already decided to make an alliance with Assyria (2 Kgs. 16:7-8), did not want to ask for a sign, claiming he did not want to test Yahweh. Testing Yahweh’s ability and trustworthiness due to a lack of faith is not the same as asking a prophet for a confirming sign to the reality of the prophecy. Isaiah condemned the whole house of David for trying the patience of Yahweh by not obeying him. He sarcastically called Yahweh “my God” rather than “your God” to show their lack of faith.

Yahweh insisted on giving Ahaz a sign, which would involve a series of events (Isa. 7:14-25). First, a well-known young woman of the royal family would give birth to a boy, whom the mother would name Immanuel, meaning “God with us.” The Hebrew word *'almah*, often translated “virgin,” can mean “young woman,” “newly married,” “maid,” or “virgin.” The fact that Isaiah called her “*the* young woman” means he was pointing to a specific woman in the vicinity and not alluding to *a* woman who would come one day. The fact that this woman would give birth to a boy just as Isaiah had predicted would be a sign to Ahaz that Yahweh was truly with Judah.

Then the boy would eventually be eating curds (sour milk) and honey, which would allow him to make wise decisions. Before this happened, however, the Assyrians would destroy Aram and Israel, whom Ahaz feared. But because Ahaz trusted in Assyria and not Yahweh, the Assyrians would come upon Judah as well and devastate the land of Judah. Yahweh would bring the Assyrians, who desired Judah as a base of operations against Egypt, and the Egyptians, who wanted Judah as a buffer state, against Assyria. Assyria would strip the land of all its crops like one shaves another’s head. Judah would be forced to live on curds and honey alone. The metaphor of Egypt and Assyria being like flies and bees is that of fighting, since they are attracted to milk and honey. This would all happen by the time Immanuel was old enough to eat curds and honey. This experience would grow the child in discernment, and the people seeing this would know that God was with Judah (Immanuel), for everything happened just as He said it would. Because of Ahaz’s lack of faith, Yahweh turned a potential blessing of deliverance and of milk and honey in the land (Deut. 32:13-14) to devastation and cursing.²⁰

This context makes it clear that this cannot be a prophecy about Jesus, for nothing points to a future figure of deliverance as seen above. Also, Isaiah made it clear that the boy would be born before the Assyrians came and would live during the Assyrians’ invasion. Jesus was not born until 600 years after the Assyrian empire came and disappeared.

This raises the question of why Matt. 1:23 states that Jesus’ birth was a fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14. Matthew is not saying that Isaiah 7:14 was a prophecy that directly predicted the coming of Jesus, rather that Jesus typologically fulfilled the greater contextual meaning of what Isaiah 7:14

²⁰ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 29-31.

was saying. Just like Isaiah was predicting that the Assyrian and Babylonian empires were coming to destroy Israel for their sins, John the Baptizer was predicting that the Roman empire that was ruling over Israel was about to destroy them (Matt. 3:7-10; which would happen in 70 AD and 135 AD). Just as the child born to the young woman in Isaiah 7 was sign of Isaiah's prophecy and proved that Yahweh was with Judah to deliver them from judgment if they repented, so also the birth of Jesus to Mary was a sign proving that Yahweh was with Israel to deliver them from judgment if they repented. However, Jesus was a greater sign than the child described in Isaiah because He literally was Immanuel, God in the flesh, who dwelt with Israel and would personally bring the deliverance of Israel from their sins. The context of Jesus' birth bore many resemblances to the context of Israel's events in Isaiah 7; therefore, Matthew used Isaiah 7 to make a connection to Jesus and to communicate the same truth about what Yahweh was doing with Israel in Matthew's day as He had done in Isaiah's day. With Jesus, however, Yahweh was doing something way bigger and cosmic than anything He had done in Isaiah's day, for Jesus is the greater Immanuel.

8:1-10 Yahweh then instructed Isaiah to write the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning “one hastens to the plunder, one hurries to the loot,” on a scroll with witnesses present. Then Isaiah conceived a child with a woman called the prophetess, who then gave birth to a son. Most likely, this is the young woman of Isa. 7:14 and her child Immanuel. It makes sense that in the next chapter this child would be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Yahweh, especially in light of the formal record and witness of the child's birth. The context of Isa. 7 and Isa. 8 both speak of the Assyrians coming before the child reached the age of reason.²¹ The name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is also fitting because the prophecy surrounding the child Immanuel in Isa. 7 turned from positive to negative, and now that the child had been born, the name given to him is negative. It was not uncommon for people in the ancient Near East to have more than one name (Gen. 32:28; 35:18; 2 Sam. 12:24-25).

Yahweh once again gave Isaiah a message of judgment with the pronouncement of the coming of Assyria. Isaiah then turned to Assyria and pronounced that they would fail to take Judah completely. Why would they fail? Because “God was with us” (Isa. 7:10b). Yahweh would prove that He was with Judah by delivering Jerusalem, which happened when Ahaz's son, King Hezekiah (715–698 BC), turned to Yahweh for help when the Assyrians were at his gates (2 Kgs. 18-19; Isa. 36-37).

8:11-22 Israel and Judah should not fear the coming of Assyria; rather, they should fear Yahweh of hosts (army), who commands and sends the Assyrians. The faithful remnant of Yahweh should stay focused on Yahweh. Yahweh had been Israel's “rock” of shelter and defense (Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:32), but now He would become a rock over which Israel and Judah would trip into judgment. Yahweh told His people not to consult the spirits of the dead but the sovereign and living God of creation on these future matters. Those who do not seek out Yahweh live in the darkness and in hunger.

9:1-7 It is at this point that Yahweh switches to themes of hope of restoration (Isa. 9:1-12:6). In 734 BC Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) expanded westward and conquered Aram and Israel in 733–32 BC. He executed King Rezin of Aram and made Aram into an Assyrian province (2 Kgs. 16:2). King Hosea (732–722 BC) of Israel assassinated Pekah and became an Assyrian puppet king (2 Kgs. 15:29-30). Assyria violated their treaty with King Ahaz (735–719 BC) of Judah and

²¹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 33.

forced him to pay a tribute tax. All this fulfilled Yahweh's prophecy in Isa. 7. It is in this aftermath that Yahweh now speaks words of assurance to Judah.

Yahweh declared that a time would come when there would be no more darkness and the northern lands of Israel that had been lost to Assyria would be restored, and Yahweh would shatter Israel's enemies. This would cause a great outburst of joy from His people, and they would burn all their clothes of war. The people would remember the birth of their new messianic king, who carried the weight of Israel and whose military strength made the nation secure.

The people would then recite His titles. Four compound titles are given. The title "wonderful counselor, which in context emphasizes the military might of this king, depicts him as a warrior-king who is an extraordinary military strategist (Isa. 11:2; 36:5). The title "mighty God" portrays the king as God's representative on the battlefield and supernaturally empowered by Yahweh. Though in hindsight it could point to the deity of Jesus, it would not have been understood this way by the original audience. Ps. 45:6 addresses the Davidic king as "God" because he functioned as God's representative to the people and the nations. In Ex. 4:16 and 7:1, Yahweh says that Moses was God to Pharaoh, for Moses was the mouthpiece and representative of Yahweh. The title "everlasting father" portrays the king as a father who protects and cares for the people (Isa. 22:21; Job 29:16). The original audience would have understood the word "everlasting" as a hyperbole emphasizing the long reign of the king (1 Kgs. 1:31; Ps. 21:4-6; 61:6-7; 72:5, 17). This is literally realized in the reign of Jesus Christ. The title "prince of peace" pictures the king as establishing a safe sociopolitical environment for his people. It does not portray him as meek and mild, for he establishes peace through military strength and who has destroyed his people's enemies (Ps. 29).²² The king will be committed to justice and righteousness (Amos 5:24) unlike the previous kings. And the secret to his success is the zeal of Yahweh of hosts (army).

9:8-10:4 Yahweh returns to the present time, and His anger burns against a people who have not repented. And though Israel had been punished, He was not done with them yet. Yahweh was angry with a people who had been devastated by the enemy but bragged that they would rebuild their homes and cities and become great again (Isa. 9:9-12). But Yahweh removed their leaders and allowed civil war to come into the nation (Isa. 9:13-17). Yahweh would scorch the land. Woe to those who were unjust and oppressed the people, for their judgment was coming.

10:5-34 Now Yahweh turns to Assyria and judges them for their evil slaughter of the nations. Yahweh used Assyria as a rod of discipline against His people, but Assyrian became arrogant and destroyed Israel for their own glory and to dominate the nations. When Yahweh was done punishing Israel and Judah, then He would punish Assyria for their pride and evil conquest, for it was Yahweh who had empowered them. An axe does not brag about its power, for its power comes from the person who swings it.

A day was coming when the remnant of Israel would return and no longer rely on the nations but on their mighty God Yahweh. Though Israel used to be as numerous as the sand on the beach, they would be only a few when they returned (Isa. 10:20-23).

Yahweh then called for Israel to taunt Assyria, for He would bring His anger down on them as He had once done with Egypt through the plagues, lifting the burden from Israel's shoulders. Yahweh describes the marching of Assyrian armies through the northern cities of Israel, coming

²² See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 39-40.

closer to Judah to destroy it (Isa. 10:28-32). But suddenly Yahweh cuts Assyria down and drives them away from His city. This was fulfilled in 701 BC when Yahweh defeated King Sennacherib (705–681) of Assyria after he put Jerusalem under siege (2 Kgs. 18:17-20:21; Isa. 36-37).

11:1-9 Yahweh then turns back to the messianic theme of Isa. 9:1-7, a messiah who would rule with justice. Assyria and then Babylon had come and cut down the tree of the Davidic line, and all that was left was a stump. But Yahweh envisions a day when a new shoot would grow out of the stump. By associating the king with Jesse, rather than David, the prophet pictures this king as a new and different David, not another disappointing Davidic descendant.²³ He is the Branch who will bear fruit, for the Spirit of Yahweh will be on him giving him divine wisdom and understanding so that he can execute the plans of Yahweh (“council and might”). The phrase “knowledge and fear of Yahweh” depicts his absolute loyalty to Yahweh and to do His will (Jer. 22:16). He will rule justly by what he sees and not what he wants, and he will slay the wicked with the just words of his mouth. Yahweh depicts a worldwide (Isa. 2:2-4) change in the nature of the animal kingdom, where no longer will they be fighting tooth and nail, the predators devouring the weak, but will live with each other in peace as herbivores. This could be metaphorical of the nature of humans or literal cosmic change in the nature of all living things.

11:10-12:6 A day will come where not only does the remnant of Israel return to Jerusalem where the messianic king rules, but all the nations will come to live in his kingdom. His kingdom will then subdue all the nations that oppose Yahweh and His rule. Israel then will sing a praise to Yahweh that although he was once angry with them, He has now worked His salvation on their behalf (Isa. 12:1-6).

Worldwide Judgment (13:1-27:13)

In this second division of Isaiah, Yahweh turns His attentions to judging the nations for their sins. The first section presents a series of judgment oracles against various nations (Isa. 13-23). There is no date given for these series of oracles against the nations in Isa. 13-23. They appear to originate from different time periods. These oracles were probably given to Judah and not the nations in order to remind the leaders to not fear the nations nor be tempted to make alliances with them, for they would be brought down one day. This series of judgments sets the stage for the second section of a worldwide judgment that would usher in the kingdom of Yahweh on earth (Isa. 24-27).

13:1-14:27 The first oracle is against Babylon, which was located in Mesopotamia where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers emptied into the Persian Gulf. Yahweh begins by rallying his army from among the nations to go against Babylon. In the same way that He used Assyria against Israel and Judah and then used Babylon against Assyria, He would use the Medo-Persian empire against Babylon. From the north across the Zagros Mountains Yahweh was bringing the Medes to attack Babylon. The Almighty was bringing the Day of Yahweh upon Babylon. The word “almighty” comes from the Hebrew word “Shaddai” (Isa. 13:6b). The patriarchs knew Yahweh primarily as El Shaddai (Ex. 6:3) and communicated Yahweh as a God of life and fertility (Gen. 17:1-8; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3) who blessed the patriarchs with children from the womb (Gen. 49:25). Outside of Genesis the name Shaddai (minus El, “God”) depicts Yahweh as the sovereign king and judge of creation who both gives and takes away life.²⁴

²³ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 44.

²⁴ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 48.

The fall of Babylon would mean deliverance for Yahweh's exiled people whom He would return to the Promised Land from their captivity in Babylon (Isa. 14:1-3). The day Yahweh gives Israel relief from their captivity, they were to take up a taunt against the king of Babylon. The taunt begins with a world celebration over the fall of Babylon, which gives relief to the nations (Isa. 14:4-8). The dead king enters the realm of the dead and is received by all the other dead kings, who thought they were great and yet were brought down to the grave. They then sarcastically taunt him that he thought he was great but has become just like them (Isa. 14:9-11). Using imagery from Babylonian mythology, Yahweh compares the dead king to the "morning star, son of the dawn" (Isa. 14:12). This was a lesser deity in the West Semitic pantheon who tried to usurp the high god (Isa. 14:12-13), yet this god was hurled down to the grave (Isa. 14:14-15).

Some have tried to argue that this is a description of the fall of Satan, but that does not fit the context. This taunt is directed toward the king of Babylon (Isa. 14:4-11), who is depicted as a human ruler. Some say that Isa. 14:4-11 is directed toward the Babylonian king but that Isa. 14:12-20 is directed toward Satan, who was the power behind the king. Yet there is nothing in the text to suggest a transition, and this figure is called a man (Isa. 14:16, 17) and is said to be dead (Isa. 14:19). Likewise, the Hebrew uses the specific names of the West Semitic deities. The Hebrew word *Shachar*, translated as "dawn," was a West Semitic god whose son was *Helel* ("shining one"), translated here as "morning star." The phrase "stars of God" refers to the assembly, known as stars, of the high god El (translated "God") in West Semitic mythology. He lived on Mount Zaphon, translated as "sacred mountain" in some NIV translations. Baal later dethroned El and took over Zaphon. This compares the king of Babylon with the god Helel, who tried to dethrone the god El or Baal from Mount Zaphon but failed and was thrown down to the grave.²⁵ The king is taunted for having similar delusions as Helel.

Later the Bible was translated into Latin, a translation called the Vulgate. The Hebrew word *helel* ("morning star") was translated to the Latin word *lucifer*, which means "bringer of light." The Latin word *lucifer* refers to anyone who provides light, whether by torch or flashlight. The translators of the King James Bible misunderstood Isa. 14 as referring to the fall of Satan and mistook the Latin word *lucifer* for the name of Satan. Nowhere in the Bible is Satan ever named as Lucifer.

Yahweh leaves the mythology and returns to the humiliating death of the king who once terrorized the nations (Isa. 14:16-17). The king's dead body is exposed for all to see, and his family line is terminated (Isa. 14:20b-23). Yahweh ends by declaring not only the end of Babylon but also Assyria.

14:28-32 The second oracle is against the Philistines, who were located on the west coast of Israel. The Philistines were rejoicing because a king who had oppressed them, "the rod that struck you" and "that snake," was dead. But they should be mourning because "the viper," the son of "that snake," was going to rise up to destroy them. These figures probably refer to Assyrian kings. Assyria would lay waste to Philistia, and the poor would inherit the land.

15:1-16:14 The third oracle was against Moab, which was located to the southeast of Israel. Yahweh announces the coming of an unknown invasion that would cause the entire nation to mourn the devastation. The shaving of heads and beards and wearing of sackcloth were public

²⁵ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 50.

signs of mourning. Moab's only hope was to turn to Judah and declare their allegiance to the king (Isa. 16:1-5). Yahweh assures them that one day their oppressor would be punished as well.

17:1-11 The fourth oracle was against Damascus, the capital of Aram (Syria), which was located northeast of Israel. Yahweh announced the destruction of the Syrian-Israelite coalition, to which Tiglath-piliser III brought an end in 733–732 BC. Both Aram and Israel would be laid to waste. Some would survive and would abandon the pagan gods and return to Yahweh.

17:12-14 The fifth oracle was against the Assyrian army, which was made up of soldiers from many nations. Even though Yahweh used them as His tool of judgment, He would sweep them away like chaff and tumbleweed.

18:1-7 The sixth oracle was against Cush (modern Ethiopia), which was located south of Egypt. It is not clear what the “land of the whirring wings” is. It could mean that Cush was filled with insects or that their army swarmed like insects. By Isaiah’s time, Cush had gained political control of Egypt and had become the main opponent of Assyria. Yahweh sent his messengers to Cush to warn them that He was coming to prune them.

19:1-25 The seventh oracle was against Egypt. Yahweh depicted Himself as riding the clouds down to Egypt and striking fear into the hearts of the Egyptians and their idols. Yahweh would create civil war in Egypt and bring an outside invader into the land. They would consult their gods and mediums but would receive no help. Yahweh would dry up the Nile and bring death to the land. All the wise men in Egypt would be of no help.

The oracle then shifts to a positive note, in which Yahweh tells of a day where Egypt will join the kingdom of Yahweh and there would be an altar to Yahweh in their land (Isa. 19:18-22). Then Yahweh announced that Egypt, Israel, and Assyria would all be joined together in the kingdom of Yahweh as brothers.

20:1-6 The eighth oracle was against Egypt and Cush. In 712 BC The Assyrian king Sargon sent an army to the city of Ashdod on Philistia to put down a rebellion (Isa. 20:1). Iamani, the king of Ashdod, sought asylum in Egypt. But the Cushite ruler Shabaka, who controlled Egypt, not wanting to anger Assyria sent Iamani to Assyria.²⁶ Yahweh decided to use this as an object lesson. He instructed Isaiah to go around naked or in his undergarments (the Hebrew word here can mean either one) for three years as a foretelling of what would happen to the great nations of Egypt and Cush when they were carried off into exile. They would be handed over in the same way they had handed Iamani over.

21:1-10 The ninth oracle was against Babylon. Like a whirlwind of destruction, the Medo-Persian army would come from the east and sweep Babylon away. Isaiah acts as a participant in the invasion and describes the terror that Babylon would feel at the sudden attack of the invading army.

21:11-12 The tenth oracle was against Dumah, an oasis in the Arabian desert southeast of Israel. Isaiah hears someone calling from Seir, located in Edom, which was located south of Israel. This person asks the watchman if he is ready for the night (judgment) to pass. The watchman announces that morning (relief) was coming but would be followed by night again.

²⁶ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 60.

21:13-17 The eleventh oracle was against Arabia. Dedan and Tema were oases, and their people were instructed to provide water for the refugees from Kedar of Arabia. Kedar would be brought down by the Assyrians as a judgment from Yahweh.

22:1-25 The twelfth oracle was against Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. It is not clear what the “Valley of Vision” is. Isaiah mourns the destruction that was about to come and gives an account of what was about to come as if it had already happened. Jerusalem was partying but should have also been mourning what was coming. Some have starved, and some of the leaders had been captured. Warriors from Elam and Kir in Mesopotamia put Judah under siege. Yahweh allowed them to tear down the wall of Jerusalem and its homes. This may refer to the Babylonian army that destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The second part of the oracle (Isa. 22:15-25) pertains to a government official by the name of Shebna, who was extremely prideful and had built an elaborate tomb for himself so that others would remember him. Yahweh would replace him with Eliakim and would care for and protect the city. But eventually all of Jerusalem would fall.

23:1-23 The fourteenth oracle was against Tyre, which was a seaport located north of Israel. Tyre was an extremely successful merchant city that epitomized pride. Therefore, Yahweh was going to humiliate Tyre and bring an end to the wealth that flowed into Phoenicia. Yahweh declared that Tyre would be forgotten for seventy years (Isa. 23:15). But one day Tyre would be restored, become a prosperous prostitute, and would become a great city of commercial trade again. But this time Tyre would be incorporated into the kingdom of Yahweh, and her prostitution profits would not be hoarded but distributed to those in need in the kingdom of Yahweh.

24:1-20 Yahweh now moves from judgment oracles against individual nations and develops His worldwide judgement that would prepare the way for His coming kingdom on earth. Yahweh declared that He would one day lay waste to the earth, and no one would survive—from the highest to the lowliest person. There would be infertility and famine, and partying would turn to anguish. Yahweh declares that they have broken the “everlasting covenant” (Isa. 24:5), which most likely refers to the Noahic Covenant that Yahweh made with all humanity after the flood (Gen. 9:1-17). This covenant was specifically called “the everlasting covenant” (Gen. 9:16) and specifically commanded humans to fill the earth, not destroy each other, and to take care of creation, which they have not done. Yahweh declares that, like the flood, a worldwide cataclysm was coming on all humans.

The “ruined city” (Isa. 24:10-13) is a typology for any city or nation that opposes Yahweh’s rule and violates the everlasting covenant. No matter how great the city or nation thinks it is, Yahweh would lay waste to it. The judgment of Yahweh causes the surviving people to praise Yahweh (Isa. 24:14-16). But Isaiah mourned the loss of those who were ensnared in the judgment’s trap. Yahweh ends with a description of a judgment that is far greater than the Noahic flood ever was.

24:21-26:7 When that day of judgment comes, Yahweh will punish the powers of heaven and the leaders of the earth (Isa. 24:21-23). The “powers of heaven” (literally in the Hebrew, “the host of the height in the height”) are members of Yahweh’s divine council (1 Kgs 22:19).²⁷ Both the gods/demons/fallen angels and the humans who opposed Yahweh will be thrown into dungeons and judged (Rev. 20:2-3). Having destroyed these enemies, Yahweh will establish His throne on

²⁷ See Cory Baugher, *The Divine Council of Yahweh*, at www.knowingthebible.net.

His cosmic mountain, Mount Zion (Isa. 2:2-4). The moon and sun will darken as they surrender their rulership of the night and day to the God of light who created them (Gen. 1:16-18; Isa. 60:19-20).

This revelation caused Isaiah to begin to praise Yahweh and declare his allegiance to Him (Isa. 25:1-5). Yahweh will then prepare a banquet on Mount Zion for all the people of faith in all the earth to join Him. Then Yahweh will swallow up death, the most terrifying enemy, and wipe the tears of sorrow from His people's eyes (Isa. 25:6-7). Those who trusted in Yahweh will live, while those who did not will be trampled (Isa. 25:9-12). In contrast to the ruined cities, Jerusalem will stand strong. Yahweh protects His people in His city and pours out His blessings on them (Isa. 26:1-7).

26:8-18 Yahweh's people now praise Him and declare their allegiance to Him. They await His future judgment because the wicked have become calloused to His mercy and justice, and sometimes only tangible judgments can convince people of His majesty. They remember Yahweh's past acts of deliverance and so endure their suffering, awaiting the kingdom like a woman in childbirth.

26:19-27:13 Yahweh responds to His people and gives them hope with the promise that their dead will be resurrected one day. Until then they must wait for His judgment to come (Isa. 26:19-21). In West Semitic mythology, the Leviathan was a seven-headed sea serpent that was allied with the sea god, who desired to destroy world order and bring chaos. Yahweh applies that imagery to the heavenly and earthly coalition that opposes Yahweh (Isa. 24:21-22). Yahweh declares that one day he will destroy the Leviathan (Rev. 20:1-3). After Yahweh's victory, He makes His people a well-watered vineyard that forever produces fruit. In contrast, He makes the idolaters a desolate wasteland (Isa. 27:2-12).

Death Gives Way to Deliverance (28:1-35:10)

This division begins with the coming judgment on Israel and Judah but ends with Yahweh's exiled people celebrating their return to the Promised Land. Isa. 28-32 goes back and forth between judgment and deliverance. In Isa. 33-34 the focus of judgment switches from Yahweh's people to Assyria and then to all the nations. In Isa. 35 Yahweh describes the future deliverance of Israel from exile.

28:7-13 Yahweh pictures Israel as a wreath of beauty that would be trampled by the Assyrians (Isa. 28:1-4). Before developing the coming judgment more, Yahweh pauses to give hope to those who remain after the judgment, for they will inherit a glorious wreath from Yahweh (Isa. 28:5-6).

Yahweh portrayed Israel's leaders as drunken fools who stumble in their own vomit (Isa. 28:7-8). Isaiah asked whom Yahweh was trying to explain His message to. Yahweh then answered that it was to Israel, who were like infants stubbornly rejecting His message. It is as if Yahweh was speaking nonsense to them. The phrase "a rule for this, a rule for that; a little here, a little there" in Hebrew sounds like the babbling of one listening to a language that they do not understand (Isa. 28:9-13).

28:14-29 The "covenant of death" was Jerusalem's alliance with Egypt. Yahweh rebuked them for thinking that Egypt would keep them safe. In contrast, Yahweh would make Jerusalem secure when He established His cornerstone. The cornerstone is the ideal Davidic ruler who would establish a just and secure city for the faithful. The new covenant that Yahweh would initiate

would surpass that of Jerusalem's alliance with Egypt. But before Yahweh established this new city, He would first have to remove the current corrupt leadership.

Yahweh admitted that His judgment against His people was not His ideal desire and even called it a "strange work" and an "alien task" (Isa. 28:21). But His judgment was an important part of bringing redemption to His people. Everything had to happen in its due time like all the stages of a farmer plowing his field.

29:1-24 Yahweh declared that He was preparing Jerusalem for judgment, whom He referred to as "Ariel." The word *Ariel* most likely means "altar hearth." Just as an altar hearth was heated for sacrifice, so Jerusalem would experience the heat of His judgment that would render them speechless.²⁸ Yahweh then predicted the day He would save Jerusalem from the Assyrians and drive them away (Isa. 29:5-8), which was fulfilled in 701 BC during Hezekiah's kingship (2 Kgs. 19-20; Isa. 36-37).

Yahweh then accused His people of being blind, drunk, and asleep (Isa. 29:9-10). Therefore, He was going to do amazing things to shock His people out of their apathy (Isa. 29:13-16). This transformation He was bringing would be as drastic as the forest of Lebanon being torn down or a deaf man suddenly hearing. The humble would rejoice at the judgment Yahweh would bring.

30:1-17 Yahweh condemned Jerusalem for making an alliance with Egypt and warned them that *Rahab* ("proud one"), referring to Egypt, would be helpless before Assyria (Isa. 30:1-7). Because Israel had not listened to Yahweh, they would be like a city wall bulging and cracking and eventually falling down. The once-proud people would flee for their lives when the Assyrians came.

30:18-33 Despite His necessary judgment, Yahweh longed to show Jerusalem compassion. He looked forward to a day where there would be no more sorrow for His people, for the land would once again produce abundance (Isa. 30:18-26). Yahweh would come in a whirlwind or storm and destroy the Assyrian army before it could overtake Jerusalem.

31:1-9 Once again, Yahweh declared that Egypt could not save Jerusalem, but Yahweh could save them.

32:1-8 One day Yahweh would establish the ideal Davidic king, who would rule with righteousness and would be a shelter from the storm and like water in the desert for His people. People would then no longer be blind and deaf to the word of Yahweh, and fools would no longer be appointed as leaders. In contrast, the current leaders of Jerusalem were scoundrels who oppressed the poor (Isa. 32:6-8).

32:9-20 Yahweh then condemned the complacent and wealthy women of Jerusalem, who felt secure but should have been trembling in fear at the judgment that was coming (Isa. 32:9-14). However, Yahweh looked to a better time, when His Spirit would be poured out on His people and the land would be filled with peace and life.

33:1-24 Yahweh declared woe to Assyria (the "destroyer" and "betrayal"), that they would be stopped before they could take Jerusalem. Isaiah then cried out to Yahweh to graciously protect them from the coming of Assyria. He cried out for mercy for the land that was already devastated and in chaos (Isa. 33:2-9).

²⁸ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 74.

In response to Isaiah's prayer, Yahweh declared that He would arise and consume Assyria in an inferno of fire. The people of Jerusalem asked who could survive the fire of Yahweh (Isa. 33:14). Yahweh responded that those who pursue righteousness can escape the fire of Yahweh's judgment (Isa. 33:15-16). Though Yahweh would destroy the rebellious sinners, the godly would be secure in Yahweh's mercy.

Yahweh then promised the godly that they would see better days. They would one day see the ideal Davidic king with their own eyes, and those who were arrogant and corrupt would be no more. Yahweh then declared that the king would be Yahweh Himself ruling among them (Isa. 33:21-22). Yahweh then portrayed Jerusalem as a boat that could not sail, referring to their inability to save themselves from the coming judgment because they had abandoned their true King (Isa. 33:23-24).

34:1-17 Yahweh then assembled all the nations, for He was going to totally destroy them and the heavenly beings that ruled over them. In the Bible and the ancient Near East, the “stars in the sky” or “starry host” is literally “host of heaven” in the Hebrew (Isa. 34:4), referring to the heavenly beings/angels. These will fade away in Yahweh's judgment. Once Yahweh's sword had defeated these heavenly beings, He would descend upon Edom. Yahweh describes Edom's defeat as a bloody sacrificial scene. The “destruction language” here is exaggerated for rhetorical effect in order to emphasize Yahweh's anger and the severe punishment that was coming.

35:1-10 Yahweh then describes the future return of His people from exile. He describes it as a dry desert being transformed into a forest or a green valley like the Garden of Eden. Those who were blind, deaf, and lame will be healed and restored. Streams of water will be flowing all throughout the land. There will be a highway of holiness going into the land, on which only the righteous can travel. No lion or ravenous beast, symbolic for the evil nations, will be able to travel it or threaten the people. Yahweh's people will enter the true Zion with celebration, and sorrow will pass away.

Yahweh Saves Jerusalem from Assyria (36:1-39:8)

This division is a narrative of Yahweh delivering Jerusalem from the Assyrian invasion as He said He would do in the previous division. After Assyria had taken Israel (northern kingdom) into captivity in 772, King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah in 701 BC and put Jerusalem under siege. King Hezekiah (715-698 BC) of Judah cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians. This division is pretty much the same story in 2 Kgs. 18:17-20:21 with an added prayer of Hezekiah in Isa. 38:9-20.

36:1-22 Sennacherib was at Lachish in the north and sent his representatives to Jerusalem to demand that Hezekiah surrender. Three of Hezekiah's officials went out to talk with Sennacherib's commanders. All the people of the city heard what Sennacherib's commander said.

The first question Sennacherib asked Hezekiah was what he was basing his confidence on that he thought he could stand against Assyria, and who his ally was who would defend him. If it was Egypt, that was unwise, for Egypt was like a splintered reed that stabs in the back everyone who trusts in them. If it was Yahweh, that was also unwise, for Hezekiah had torn down all of Yahweh's high places. Sennacherib assumed that Yahweh was like all the other gods and wanted many high places at which He could be worshiped. He did not realize Yahweh was different and had commanded the destruction of the high places. He then stated that Hezekiah had no hope of

standing against Assyria even if he gave him 2,000 horses. Even Yahweh had commanded Sennacherib to attack and defeat Judah. Most likely this claim came from listening to the prophets but misunderstanding the details.

Hezekiah's officials asked the commander to speak only in Aramaic so that the people would not understand what was being said, but the commander refused. At that point the commander addressed them in the plural, hoping to turn public sentiment against Hezekiah. The commander spoke to the people and told them to not trust in Hezekiah, who was saying that Yahweh would protect them. Then the commander told the people to make peace with Assyria, that they would be given land and food—a lie as seen by what they did to Israel. Then Sennacherib, through his commander, insulted Yahweh and denied His sovereignty by saying that He would not be able to save Judah any more than the other gods had been able to save their own people from Assyria. Yahweh's response to this insult would account for Assyria's failure to take Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 19:27-28). The people said nothing, and Hezekiah's officials reported to him what Sennacherib had said.

37:1-7 When Hezekiah heard this, he mourned and immediately went into the temple and cried out to Yahweh. He then sent his officials to Isaiah the prophet to intercede on Israel's behalf. Unlike so many kings who came before Hezekiah, he showed himself to be a man of God by immediately going to Yahweh for help. Yahweh then spoke through Isaiah and said that He was going to make Sennacherib return to his home, where he would die for how he had spoken out against Yahweh.

37:8-13 Yahweh's method of deliverance was causing rebellions. First there was a rebellion against Assyria in Libnah, a few miles northeast of Lachish, and then Sennacherib received word that the king of Cush (southern Egypt) was coming to attack from the southwest, the direction opposite of Libnah and Jerusalem. Thus, he had to suspend his siege against Jerusalem. Once again Sennacherib insulted the sovereignty of Yahweh when he told the people of Judah not to be deceived when Yahweh said that they would be safe. None of the other gods had been able to protect their people.

37:14-20 Once again Hezekiah immediately went to Yahweh for help, but this time he did not ask Isaiah to pray but prayed himself. Hezekiah praised Yahweh for being the only sovereign God over all of creation. He then acknowledged that it was true that the other gods did not save their people from the Assyrians, but it was because they were not all powerful like Yahweh is. He asked Yahweh to deliver them so that all the other nations would know that Yahweh was the only true sovereign God of creation.

37:21-29 Then Yahweh sent word to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah. The virgin daughter of Zion are the people of Yahweh living in Judah. Yahweh declared that Jerusalem mocks Sennacherib because he thought he was great, but he did not stand a chance against Yahweh, who had put His name (character) in Jerusalem. Sennacherib had taken credit for all of his accomplishments and his ability to destroy the nations, but it was Yahweh who had given him that power and his victories over the nations as a judgment for their sins. Because Sennacherib did not acknowledge and submit to Yahweh as the source of his power and ability, Yahweh was going to drive him out of the land and do to him what he had done to the nations. Hooks and bridle bits are ancient Near Eastern imagery of slavery and deportation. (Ezek. 38:4; ANET 300; 447)

37:30-35 Isaiah then gave Jerusalem a sign that the prophecy would come to pass. The people of Jerusalem had not been able to plant crops because of the Assyrian siege, so Yahweh promised to feed His people for two years with the crops that came up naturally, which was a covenant blessing for trust in Yahweh (Deut. 28:33). In the third year they would return to their fields to sow and reap the crops. Then Yahweh declared that Sennacherib would not enter Jerusalem but would return home.

37:36-38 That night an angel of Yahweh went through Sennacherib's camp and put to death 185,000 soldiers, much like the night before the exodus in Egypt (Ex. 12:29-30). Overwhelmed by the supernatural attack, Sennacherib left Jerusalem and returned to Nineveh. Then he was assassinated by his own sons in the temple of his god Nisroch, who may be Marduk or Nusku.²⁹ Sennacherib had favored his younger son Esarhaddon, and sibling rivalry apparently existed as Esarhaddon struggled to secure the throne upon his father's death (ANET 289-290). Ironically, the Assyrian king suffered assassination in the temple of his god, who was not able to protect him. This was the very thing he had charged Yahweh with being unable to do for Judah.

38:1-8, 21-22 The events of Isa. 38 most likely happened before the events of Isa. 36-37 (701 BC). The first episode (Isa. 38) explains how Hezekiah's faith spared Judah from exile under the Assyrians. The second episode (Isa. 39) explains why Hezekiah's lack of trust in Yahweh would bring exile under the Babylonians. By placing this episode last, the narrative ends in a more negative way and prepares the reader for the final chapters of the book of Kings. The fall of Jerusalem is certain, and even a righteous king contributes to its certainty.

Isaiah was sent to Hezekiah to inform him that he would not recover from his illness and should get his affairs in order. As before, Hezekiah immediately prayed to Yahweh for healing. Though his response was very godly, his prayer was more self-centered, stressing his own righteousness. Yahweh was so quick to respond to Hezekiah that He sent Isaiah back before he could even leave the palace. Yahweh told Hezekiah that He had heard his prayer and was going to add fifteen more years to his life and protect Judah. Then Isaiah applied a poultice of figs to Hezekiah's boils, and he was healed.

Hezekiah asked for a sign to validate the prophecy. Yahweh gave Hezekiah a choice between seeing the shadow of the sun go back or forward ten steps. Hezekiah chose back ten steps since this was not the natural movement of the shadow of the sun.

38:9-20 This prayer of Hezekiah is an addition to 2 Kgs 18:17-20:21 and is inserted between Isa. 38:8 and 38:21. Following his recovery, Hezekiah offered a prayer to Yahweh. He begins by expressing the sorrow he felt when he found out he was going to die. He compared his death to a shepherd folding up his tent, a weaver cutting fabric from the loom, and the darkness of night replacing the light of day. Then Yahweh healed him, and he realized that his suffering had drawn him closer to Yahweh and gave him an appreciation of His forgiveness. He declared that he was able to praise and serve him being alive, which he would not have been able to do from the grave.

39:1-8 Judah was one of the only nations that had not been deported by the Assyrians and was growing in strength because of Yahweh's blessing for Hezekiah's faithfulness. Babylon was seeking to rebel against Assyria, and Marduk-Baladan of Babylon was most likely sending gifts to Hezekiah in order to form an alliance against Assyria. Hezekiah, in a desire to be included in

²⁹ See John Gray. *I & II Kings*, pp. 694-695.

an alliance, brought the Babylonian envoys to his city in order to show them all his wealth, what he could contribute to the alliance. After Yahweh had delivered Hezekiah from the Assyrian army, he was now looking to the might of Babylon, instead of Yahweh, to protect him.

Yahweh sent Isaiah to confront Hezekiah on his lack of trust. As a judgment for Hezekiah showing off to Babylon, Babylon would one day come and take it all. Also, some of Hezekiah's descendants would be carried off to Babylon and made eunuchs, meaning they would not be able to continue on the family line. The exile of Judah was now coming. Hezekiah was selfishly satisfied that it would not happen in his lifetime. There is no acknowledgement or repentance of his folly in trusting in the riches of Jerusalem for deliverance, and there is none of his previous concern for the ongoing welfare of Jerusalem. When Hezekiah died, he was succeeded by his son Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:1-18).

Restoration and Renewal (40:1-55:13)

This second half of the book (Isa. 40-66) anticipates the exile and addresses the concerns of the future exiles of Babylon. It seeks to convince them that Yahweh is actively involved in their lives and wants to deliver them from exile and establish a new era in Israel's history. In this division (Isa. 40-55) Isaiah speaks to the future exiles as if He is physically present with them in exile. He gives them hope that Yahweh is about to honor His promises to restore them to the Promised Land.

40:1-11 Yahweh begins with a message of comfort for His people: that they had paid for their sins and their hardship was over. A messenger, called "a voice of one calling," gives instructions to prepare for Yahweh's return to Jerusalem. In Ezek. 10 Yahweh's glory left Jerusalem before the Babylonians came in 586 BC. Here Jerusalem was to prepare for His return. They were to create a processional highway through the desert to Jerusalem.

Another messenger interrupts the first and announces that all humans are frail and finite and pass away like grass (Isa. 40:6-8). Their faithfulness and promises are also unreliable. This is contrasted with the context of Yahweh's fulfilling His promise to return His people to the Promised Land.

The vision of Yahweh's return continues as the first messenger announces the good news of Yahweh's return from the top of Mount Zion (Isa. 40:9). Yahweh is portrayed as a warrior-king who comes back from battle to rule over His people. The "mighty arm" communicates military conquest. But now He gathers His people into His arms of comfort.

40:12-31 The Israelites might have thought Yahweh was limited in His power and inferior to the Babylonian gods because of their exile, but now Yahweh assures them that this is not true. With a series of rhetorical questions that expect an answer of "no one but Yahweh," Yahweh declares His sovereignty over creation. The nations are nothing in comparison to Yahweh (Isa. 40:18-20). And not all the sacrifices in the world could give testimony to the greatness of Yahweh. There is no image in all of creation that can adequately represent the grandeur of Yahweh. People make idols of the gods, but they are pathetic and limited, mere images that can do nothing (Isa. 40:18-20). But Yahweh sits above all creation and conducts all the events of the cosmos and human history. There is nothing that is His equal (Isa. 40:21-26).

Israel has no need to complain or worry, for Yahweh is sovereign over all creation, and He never grows tired or lacks wisdom (Isa. 40:27-31). In fact, He gives supernatural strength to those who maintain their faith in Him. Therefore, the exiles should look to the future with hope and joy.

41:1-7 Yahweh challenges the nations to a debate on the superiority of Yahweh compared to their gods. Yahweh presents His ability to control human history as proof of His incomparability and sovereignty. He then tells of His ability to predict and direct the coming of King Cyrus II of Persia (see Isa. 44:28-45:4). The nations tried to thwart the power of Yahweh by creating more idols, which supposedly increased the presence and power of their gods, but this failed.

41:8-20 Yahweh reminds His people that they were His chosen servant, and He would restore them back to the Promised Land just as He had established them as His people from the very beginning. All the enemies of Israel that once attacked them will be no more. Though Israel is seen as a worm by the nations, Yahweh is their God who will take them by the hand and redeem them. He will restore the land so that it would look and produce like a garden.

41:21-29 Yahweh turns to the pagan gods and challenges them to prove that they are superior in power. He challenges them to predict and control the events of human history. Once again Yahweh points to the coming of Cyrus II who would come from the north. The only one who foretold of his coming was Yahweh.

42:1-12 Isa. 42:1-7 is the first of the four servant songs (Isa. 42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:3-53:12). Some see this servant as Cyrus II, especially after the last chapter. However, Cyrus II is portrayed there as a violent warrior (Isa. 41:2-3, 25), while His servant is portrayed as meek (Isa. 42:2-3). Many see this servant as Israel since this servant is called Israel several times in Isa. 40-48 (Isa. 49:3). Though the servant is called Israel (Isa. 49:3), he is portrayed as distinct from Israel by the uses of the pronouns “he,” referring to the servant, and “we,” referring to Israel (Isa. 53:1-6), as well as by Israel’s being the benefactor of his ministry (Isa. 53:8). He is also described as a second Moses who would deliver Israel, mediate a new covenant (Isa. 49:5-8), and lead Israel back to the Promised Land (Isa. 49:9-13). The servant is an ideal Israel who embodies Yahweh’s ideal for His people, and he will do what Israel could never do. For whereas Israel is said to be blind (Isa. 42:19), this servant opens the eyes of the blind (Isa. 42:7). Israel is said to have suffered in exile for their own sins (Isa. 40:2; 42:24-25; 43:24-25; 44:21-22; 48:1-8, 18; 50:1), whereas the servant suffers innocently on behalf of Israel and the nations (Isa. 53:3-8).³⁰ This servant is the messianic king (Isa. 11:1-9) who would be empowered by Yahweh to do what Israel could never do because of their sin.

Here in Isa. 42:1-12, as a further testimony of His superiority, Yahweh makes a new prediction. He announced that His “servant,” energized by the Spirit of Yahweh, would bring justice on earth. This servant, like Moses, would be commissioned by Yahweh (Isa. 42:3-6), mediate a new covenant (Isa. 42:8), and become what Israel was meant to be. In light of the coming servant, Isaiah called Israel to praise Yahweh (Isa. 42:10-12).

42:13-17 Yahweh then marches into the nations as a warrior-king, ready to crush the nations for what they have done to His people Israel. He will save his people and crush the ones who worship idols.

42:18-25 The blind is associated with the exiles, who were spiritually blind. Yahweh gave them the Mosaic Covenant and revealed Himself to them through many wonders of Yahweh, but they remained spiritually dull. They were supposed to be a light to the nations but instead were plundered by the nations because of their sin.

³⁰ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 99, 112, 117-118.

43:1-13 Yahweh assures Israel that they belong to Him and that He will redeem them from exile. He then connects their return from exile to their exodus from Egypt. The fire is symbolic of judgment. The idea is that ultimately they will survive the judgment of Yahweh, for He has promised to redeem them. Yahweh would be with them no matter where they are, and He will cause the north (Persian Empire) to give them up. Israel will then be healed and will be Yahweh's witness as they were meant to be.

43:14-21 Yahweh, as Israel's Creator and Redeemer, promises to deliver them out of exile and into the Promised Land just as He had done in the exodus. There He led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea, destroyed the Egyptian Army, and provided water in the wilderness. He will do the same thing with their exit out of Babylon.

43:22-28 Then Yahweh calls them out for their lack of animal sacrifices. Though the Israelites had made millions of sacrifices, Yahweh speaks as if they had made none since they made them while continuing to sin and without true devotion to Yahweh. Yahweh was ready to forgive Israel of their sin, but they must first own their sin and truly repent. From the very beginning with Jacob, they have been sinning.

44:1-5 Yahweh then assures His people that He would save them. Here He calls them Jeshurun, which means “upright one,” used only here and in Deuteronomy 32-33. In Deuteronomy 32-33 Jeshurun became prosperous through Yahweh’s blessing but then rebelled against Yahweh. Yahweh then became Jeshurun’s king and reaffirms His blessing. Yahweh would make Israel Jeshurun.

44:6-23 Yahweh reaffirms that He is the only unique creator God of creation and reminds them that he had foretold their exile and would do what He promised. Those who make and trust in idols are nothing, for they are like the idols. Yahweh makes two points. First, He “formed” (*yasar*) His people, and people “make” (*yasar*) idols. Yahweh is the creator, and the pagan gods are created by people. Second, Israel need not be “afraid” (*pakhad*), but the worshipers of idols are “terrified” (*pakhad*) before their enemies. Yahweh secures His people, but the gods cannot do the same.³¹ Yahweh emphasizes these points by stating that the idols are merely wood and sit there and do nothing. And if they the makers of the idols lose strength, then the idols are frail and cannot offer any power to the people. Why had Israel been unable to connect the dots? The wood that the idols is used to fashion gods is also used for burning for heat. Unlike the pagan gods, Yahweh was the one who made them and redeemed them. So, He is the only one worthy of their praise (Isa. 44:21-23).

44:24-45:8 Yahweh is the Maker of all things and overthrows all the wisest prophets and teachers. He is the only one who speaks and then it happens. Yahweh is the one who speaks of Cyrus II (559–530 BC) before he was even born and then raises him up to do His will of returning Israel to their land. Yahweh is the one who will go before Cyrus II and give him the ability to be a great warrior to build a kingdom. This will be done to give glory to Yahweh, returning His people to the Promised Land.

45:9-19 Some of the exiles doubted what Yahweh promised to do. Yahweh compares them to insignificant pottery lying on the ground and rebukes them. The pottery never challenges its maker in what he is doing or will do. It is absurd and arrogant to question the Almighty Creator. He will do what He said and bring it to fulfillment.

³¹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 106.

45:20-25 Once again Yahweh confronts the pagan nations and those who worshiped idols and challenges them to consider the facts of who He is. He called them to come to Him and be saved and experience His blessing—respond now, for a day is coming when every knee will bow and acknowledge His sovereignty. But on that day His enemies would be destroyed.

46:1-13 Yahweh then demeans the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo. Bel (“lord”) was a title for Marduk, and Nebo (or Nabu) was his son, the god of writing, wisdom, and destiny. Yahweh mocks them for being captured when Babylon fell to the Persians. Whereas the pagan gods are carried by people, Yahweh is the one who has carried His people and sustained them throughout history. Though His people are stubborn to see the truth, Yahweh would honor His promises.

47:1-15 Yahweh portrays Babylon as a pampered queen who would be dethroned and have to sit in the dirt and grind flour. She would be forced to take off her veil and skirt and cross the stream naked and exposed to all. Yahweh was the one who gave His people into Babylon’s hands, and He would deliver them from Babylon. This would happen to Babylon because of their wicked sins and the way they oppressed Israel while in exile.

48:1-22 Yahweh addresses Israel and told them that they went into exile because they had to be broken of their extreme stubbornness before Yahweh could truly redeem them. Yahweh told them long ago that this would happen so that they could not give credit to the pagan gods for their deliverance from exile. Yahweh would now do these new things that had not been announced by any other.

He was able to do this because He is the creator who brought all things into existence. Yahweh then tells them that He has always wanted to make them fruitful in numbers and bless them, but they would not pay attention and obey His commands. But now the time had come to celebrate their deliverance from exile.

49:1-13 In Isa. 50-54 Isaiah shifts back and forth between Yahweh’s chosen servant and the restoration and renewal of Zion. Despite the opposition and suffering of the servant, he would persist in his mission to lead sinful Israel back to Yahweh. This would lead to the restoration of the true Jerusalem and renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and His people.³²

Isa. 49:1-13 is the second of the servant songs. The chosen servant of Yahweh begins to speak of how Yahweh chose and commissioned him from birth to bring forth the word of Yahweh and accomplish His will. Yahweh addresses His servant as Israel, for it was through Israel that Yahweh had intended to work in order to be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). The mission of Yahweh has been difficult and stressful, but the servant believes that Yahweh will eventually bring him through his ordeal and reward his perseverance. The servant says that he was chosen to restore Israel to Yahweh but also to bring light to the nation. “Light” symbolizes deliverance from bondage (Isa. 42:6-7; 51:4-6). Yahweh was going to deliver Israel and the nations from their bondage to sin and death. This servant would be a king to Israel and all the nations.

Yahweh will use this servant to mediate a new covenant between Yahweh and humanity and lead them out of captivity to the Promised Land (Isa. 49:7-13). Yahweh would provide food and water for His people and remove all obstacles in their path.

³² See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 111.

49:14-50:3 Yahweh shifts from the servant to the desolate city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is portrayed a woman who has been abandoned by her husband. Zion laments that Yahweh has forgotten her, but Yahweh assures that He has not forgotten her any more than a mother could forget her child. Yahweh speaks of the exiled Israelites as the woman's children and that they would return and become a source of pride again, like bridal jewelry (Isa. 49:17-18). The number of her children who will return will be so great that they will not fit in Jerusalem. Jerusalem would have to be expanded (Isa. 49:19-21). Even the hostile nations and their rulers will return the children of Jerusalem to her. And the children would submit to the will of Yahweh (Isa. 49:22-26). Israel was divorced and in exile because of sin, not because of Babylon's military might. Therefore, He was more than capable of returning them to their land (Isa. 50:1-3).

50:4-11 Isa. 50:4-9 is the third of the servant songs. The servant declares that Yahweh has given him the ability to represent Yahweh and do His will. The servant did not rebel against Yahweh or turn from his mission when he was persecuted by others. He endured the violence against him because he knew that Yahweh was with him and would reward him. He challenged his accusers to truly challenge him on their accusations against him, for Yahweh is his judge. No one could condemn him.

Yahweh then commands His followers to obey His servant (Isa. 50:10-11). And like the servant, they were to endure their suffering in exile and trust that Yahweh would deliver them. Then He warned those who oppressed His servant that they would be judged.

51:1-15 Yahweh then calls Israel to remember their past—when Yahweh chose Abraham and His barren wife to be the parents of His chosen people. Just as Yahweh had brought life to them in Isaac, He would bring life to them in their restoration to the Promised Land and make it a well-watered land (Isa. 51:1-3). Yahweh would bring His justice to the earth and remove all the enemies of Israel (Isa. 51:4-8).

Isaiah asks Yahweh to reveal His mighty arm of divine strength and demonstrate His deliverance as He had for Israel while they were in Egypt (Isa. 51:9-11). Yahweh's defeat of Egypt is portrayed as a victory over a sea monster called Rahab, which means the "Proud One." This is also the Leviathan (Isa. 27:1) and represents the forces of chaos that seek to destroy the created order (Job. 26:12; Ps. 89:10). Isaiah connects this defeat of Rahab to Yahweh's defeat of Egypt through the means of the Red Sea and Israel's deliverances from Egypt through the Red Sea. The prophet anticipated that Yahweh would do the same thing when He returned Israel to Zion (Isa. 51:11). Yahweh then rebuked Israel for so easily forgetting His acts of deliverance in the past and not believing that He could do it again for them (Isa. 51:12-15).

51:16-52:12 Yahweh commissioned the servant to restore Jerusalem. He then addresses personified Jerusalem as an intoxicated woman who had to drink the wrath of Yahweh's anger and stumbles through the streets without anyone to help her to walk. But Yahweh was about to take the cup of His wrath from her and give it to her enemies (Isa. 51:16-23).

Now Yahweh calls Jerusalem to stand up, take off her chains, and clothe herself with beautiful clothes, for the people of Yahweh were about to return. And Yahweh Himself would also return to Zion as their king (Isa. 52:1-12).

52:13-53:12 This is the fourth of the servant songs. The song describes the suffering of the servant and begins and ends with Yahweh's eventual vindication of the servant. Yahweh's servant would suffer so greatly that he would no longer be recognized as a man. Yet when

Yahweh vindicates him afterward, he will startle the nations with his coming as king for they would never be able to see his coming (Isa. 52:13-15).

Isaiah then speaks what Israel will think after the servant's suffering and vindication and they come to their senses and realize that he is truly their king and deliverer (Isa. 1-11a). From the very beginning the servant seemed insignificant and was not impressive in any political way. He was rejected by his people and suffered for the sins of Israel and not his own. Like sheep, Israel had wandered off of Yahweh's moral path, yet he was punished for their sins, like an innocent sacrificial lamb instead of them. Though the servant was crushed by Yahweh on Israel's behalf, Yahweh used him to make restitution for Israel so that they could have long life with him. Because he suffered innocently for others, Yahweh would vindicate him and give him a great inheritance.

54:1-17 Yahweh turns to the personified Jerusalem and encourages her to not be afraid, for she would not be put to shame, and Yahweh would no longer remember her disgrace and sin; her husband, Yahweh, was the one who made her and would call her back from her desolation. Like in the Noahic Covenant, Yahweh promised that He would never destroy her again. He would vindicate her, and all her children who live within her walls will follow Yahweh, and no one will dare to come against her.

55:1-13 Yahweh announces to all the earth to come to Him and eat a banquet, which would cost them nothing. Just like the unconditional Davidic Covenant that Yahweh made, He would make another one with people from all the nations (Isa. 55:1-5). Yahweh calls all the people from all the nations to abandon their wickedness and return to Him, and He would freely forgive them. His ways are superior to all others, and His gift is better than all others (Isa. 55:6-9). The promises Yahweh makes are never empty nor leave people wanting. He promises that all creation would sing with the restoration He is bringing.

Beyond the Exile (56:1-66:24)

This division portrays Jerusalem lying in ruins and anticipates the return of the exiles, the rebuilding of Judah's cities, and Yahweh's return to Zion. Yahweh made it clear that in this new Zion, Israel was to obey Yahweh and live righteously. Being restored to the land is no guarantee of restored blessings in the land. If necessary, He would again purify the covenant community of their sin.

56:1-8 Yahweh encouraged Israel to promote justice and do what was right. Yahweh declares that He will open His temple doors to the foreigner and the eunuch, both groups having been previously excluded from the temple (Deut. 23:1-8). All people from all the world will have access to the holy cosmic mountain of Yahweh.

56:9-57:13a Yahweh's tone shifts drastically as he condemns the sin of Israel. Yahweh knows that some of the people who return from the exile will continue in their sin and rebellion and put the community at risk for further judgment. Yahweh sarcastically invites the wild animals to devour the sinful people.

57:13b-21 But though the godly were being oppressed, Yahweh would vindicate them when they cried out for His help. Though Yahweh sits high on His throne, He is not inaccessible; He will come down to His people and deliver them. Yahweh will punish sin, but He will not overdo it because He knows that humans are fragile by nature.

58:1-14 Yahweh confronts the hypocrisy of His people after their exile and tells them that it does not matter how much they fast if they continue to be unloving toward others. The fasting and humility Yahweh desires is from a people who seek to turn away from their sin and pursue godliness. When that happens, Yahweh will respond to them. They must also actively take care of the needs of others. And then Yahweh would rebuild them into a great nation.

59:1-21 Yahweh tells the people He is able to rescue them but that their sin has alienated them from Him. No one cared about justice, and they used their craftiness to cheat people. Therefore, Israel would grope around in the darkness of their blindness and not find the light because of their rebellious deeds.

Yahweh cannot tolerate the injustice He sees, so He takes matters into His own hands. Like a warrior preparing for battle, He clothes Himself in righteousness and punishes the wicked. To the righteous He is a protector and deliverer.

60:1-22 Yahweh describes the future glory of personified Zion. Though there is darkness in the world, Yahweh shines light on Zion, and the nations come to her. The foreigners from the nations will not only come by the droves into Zion, but they will help rebuild the city and its walls. The gates of Zion will always remain open, welcoming to all. But the nations that oppose Zion will be destroyed. Those who were once oppressed will be honored, and suffering will be no more. They will be planted in the ground like a shoot, and the people will be godly.

61:1-11 The servant of Yahweh speaks again (Isa. 61:1-3) and announces that He has been commissioned by Yahweh to enact the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:10) and set the captives free from both physical and spiritual bondage. He is to bring comfort to a mourning people. Yahweh then begins to speak somewhere in Isa. 61:3b-7 and declares that He would rebuild and restore His people and their cities. The personified Zion then speaks (Isa. 61:10-11) and praises Yahweh for clothing and restoring her like a bride. She will be ready to produce crops again.

62:1-12 An unidentified speaker then declares that He will not stop praying for Zion until she is restored. Zion will no longer be known as “Deserted” and “Desolate” but as “My Delight Is in Her” and “Married.” The speaker then announces that he has posted watchmen on the city walls to remain diligent in prayer and look for the restoration of Zion.

Yahweh announces that He will never again give the blessings of Israel to her enemies, for Israel will enjoy the blessings of Yahweh (Isa. 62:8-10). The speaker announces that he sees Yahweh coming for His people and city to dwell with them once again (Isa. 62:11-12).

63:1-6 Isaiah then sees a warrior-king come from the south of Edom. Edom here is a symbol of all the nations, as in Isa. 34. Isaiah asks who it is. Yahweh responds that “it is I.” He is the one who is able to deliver His people. Isaiah asks why His clothes are stained red. Yahweh states that, like one treading grapes into wine, He has been stomping on the nations in His wrath. He is disappointed that no one volunteered to join Him in punishing the nations. So in His own strength He delivered His people with His mighty hand.

63:7-64:12 Isaiah, speaking on behalf of Israel, offers a prayer. He begins of telling of the faithfulness of Yahweh to His people throughout their history and of the many good things He has done for them. Though His people suffered, He suffered with them and came to rescue them from Egypt. But in the wilderness, they rebelled against Him, so He punished them. Isaiah prays that Yahweh would look down on Israel, hear their confession, and deliver them from bondage as He did in Egypt (Isa. 63:15-16).

Yahweh had temporarily turned His back on the people, which caused them to become bitter and to harden their hearts. The prophet declares that Israel is Yahweh's people and that He needs to rescue them (Isa. 63:17-19). Isaiah asks Yahweh to split the sky and descend to earth to rescue His people (Isa. 64:1-5). All of earth will tremble in Yahweh's coming, for there is no one like Yahweh. The prophet confesses that Israel stands guilty in the presence of Yahweh but cries out for reconciliation (Isa. 64:6-12).

65:1-25 Yahweh responds to Isaiah that He has gone out of His way to reveal Himself to Israel and seek reconciliation but that they have persisted in their sin and rebellion (Isa. 65:1-7). Thus, He will persist in His judgment through many generations because the people will continue to sin through many generations.

But like always, Yahweh does not bring judgment upon the righteous along with the wicked (Isa. 65:8-10). Yahweh's servant, who is the remnant, will be restored to the Promised Land, and the land will flourish once again. However, idolaters will have no place in the restoration of the remnant, and they will die by the sword (Isa. 65:11-16). The wicked will live without the blessings of the Promised Land.

Using the language of creation, Yahweh declares that He will create a new heaven and earth where problems and suffering will not be remembered (Isa. 65:17-22). Death's power will be no more, and people will enjoy peace and prosperity. Yahweh depicts a worldwide change (Isa. 2:2-4; 11:6-9) in the nature of the animal kingdom, where they will no longer be fighting tooth and nail, with the predators devouring the weak, but they will live in peace with each other as herbivores. This could be metaphorical of the nature of humans or a literal cosmic change in the nature of all living things.

66:1-16 Even though the temple of Yahweh lies in ruin in Jerusalem, He is still the sovereign God of creation; the heavens are His throne, and the earth is His footstool. Once again, He reminds His people that He shows favor to the righteous and judges the wicked.

Yahweh returns to the restoration of Zion, personified as a pregnant woman enduring labor pains and about to give birth to a redeemed people (Isa. 66:7-11). All should praise Jerusalem like one praises a mother who has given birth to a child. Yahweh is about to make Zion prosperous so that her riches flow to all the nations of the earth (Isa. 66:12-16). They will all enjoy life like a child nursing at a mother's breasts. Yahweh will console His people, and they will rejoice, for Yahweh is coming in the whirlwind, ready to punish the nations and free His people.

66:17-24 All the nations of all the earth will be gathered in judgment, and all those who are outside the covenant law will be destroyed. Yahweh declares that all the nations will give up their captives and bring them to Him as an offering. All the nations will worship Yahweh on a weekly basis throughout the years. And all will look upon the dead of the rebellious. The book of Isaiah began with Yahweh's fire consuming the "rebels" who engaged in pagan practices, purifying Zion, and making Zion the center of worldwide worship (Isa. 1:27-2:4). Now the prophecy comes full circle, and the book of Isaiah ends on the same note.³³

³³ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 137.

Nahum

Nahum was a pre-Babylonian prophet who ministered sometime between the fall of the Egyptian city in 663 BC and the fall of the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 612 BC. Israel (northern kingdom) had fallen and been taken into captivity by the Assyrian empire (722 BC). And now the Assyrians were invading Judah. But due to Hezekiah's (715–698 BC) faith in Yahweh (2 Kgs. 18–19), Judah would be spared captivity at the hands of the Assyrians. Nahum announced to Judah that the Assyrian empire would fall under the judgment of Yahweh for their crimes against the nations. The purpose of the book of Nahum was to announce the downfall of Assyria as an example of how Yahweh will not allow violent empires to endure.

The book of Nahum is arranged in two divisions: the announcement of Nineveh's destruction (Nah. 1:1–14) and the description of Nineveh's destruction (Nah. 1:15–3:19).

The Announcement of Nineveh's Destruction (1:1–15)

This division opens with a vision of Yahweh's coming as a warrior-king (Nah. 1:1–11) and then announces in a hymnic style Nineveh's destruction (Nah. 1:12–15).

1:1–11 Nahum announced that Yahweh was a zealous God of vengeance who would unleash His wrath against His enemies, who oppress others. The word *jealous* in the NIV should read *zealous* since it is in the context of His anger against Nineveh. In Nahum's vision of Yahweh, He comes to northern Israel, which now belonged to Assyria, as a warrior-king who causes the lush regions of Bashan and Carmel to wither and the stable mountains to tremble in the face of His anger against Assyria. No one can withstand the volcanic anger of Yahweh. Yet Yahweh is a good God whose anger is the result of His love for His people who have been wronged, and He will protect them. This judgment on Nineveh would be deliverance for His people. Nineveh would not be able to outthink or stand against Yahweh.

1:12–15 Nahum then gave the oracle from Yahweh. Even though Assyria was powerful and great, it would be destroyed by Yahweh. Though Yahweh allowed Israel to be afflicted for their sins, they had been thoroughly punished and would be afflicted no more. Yahweh would free Judah from their oppression under Assyria. Yahweh would destroy the idols and the temples of Assyria's gods. Nahum described the coming of a messenger who announces the beginning of a celebration at the fall of the wicked Assyrian empire.

The Description of Nineveh's Destruction (2:1–3:19)

This division opens with a revelation from Yahweh of the coming of Babylon to destroy Nineveh (Nah. 2:1–2). Yahweh then gives four descriptions of Nineveh's destruction (Nah. 2:3–10; 2:11–13; 3:1–7; 3:8–19).

2:1–10 Nahum described the coming of an enemy (Babylonian empire) who would attack Assyria and restore the majesty and fields of Israel. The shields and spears of this coming army would be dyed red like blood. Their chariots would race through the streets of Nineveh destroying the city. The soldiers of Nineveh would stumble as they defended the city, and eventually they would fall and be taken into exile. The people would cry out for it all to stop, while the conquerors would cry out for the plunder of the city. There would be nothing but despair for Nineveh. What they had once done to the nations would be done to them.

2:11-13 Nahum then taunted the once-mighty lion of Nineveh. Their lion-like terror that tore the nations apart would be no more. For Yahweh and His heavenly army would no longer back the Assyrians but would be against them, burning their chariots and devouring their lions.

3:1-7 Yahweh would destroy Nineveh for their bloodshed of the nations and the fact that they had become powerful and wealthy from their oppression and enslavement of the nations. Nahum then went back to describing the coming invasion of the Babylonians. They would ride in on their chariots and pile the dead Ninevites in the city. This would happen because they were filled with lust and greed like a prostitute, practiced sorcery, and enslaved the nations. Therefore, Yahweh would strip them of all their wealth and then shame them in their “nakedness” before the nations. He would cover them with filth and make them a spectacle of disgust to the nations. There would be no one who would lament for or comfort Nineveh.

3:8-19 Nineveh would fall just as Thebes, who had thought they were secure and untouchable. They were unlimited in their strength and power, yet they went into captivity humiliated and their people were destroyed.

Likewise, all their fortifications would fall like the figs of a shaken tree. They could do all they wanted to defend themselves, but fire would consume them. They had increased to great numbers, like a swarm of locusts, yet they would all fly away into captivity. They would be wounded to the point of death, and all the nations would celebrate their demise.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah was a pre-Babylonian prophet who ministered to Judah (southern kingdom) during 640–620 BC, during the reign of Josiah (640–609 BC) of Judah. Judah had become corrupt just like Israel, so Yahweh would allow them to be destroyed and taken into captivity by the Babylonians (586 BC) just like Israel was by the Assyrians (722 BC). The purpose of the book of Zephaniah was to foretell the judgment of Judah and the surrounding nations and the promise to restore Israel one day.

The book of Zephaniah is arranged in two divisions: the judgment against the nations (Zeph. 1:1-3:7) and the day of Yahweh's blessing (Zeph. 3:9-20).

The Judgment Against the Nations (1:1-3:7)

In this division Yahweh condemns Judah and all the nations for their sins and predicts the coming of an army that would destroy them.

1:1-6 It seems that Zephaniah was a descendant of Hezekiah (715–698 BC), the former king of Judah. Yahweh announced that He would destroy all the world in a destruction equivalent to the flood (Gen. 6-8). He described the undoing of the orderliness of creation in the reverse order of the creation week. The sin of humanity had corrupted everything in creation. Yahweh would attack Judah and destroy all the idols of Baal and all those who worship him.

1:7-18 The appropriate response to this de-creation was awestruck silence. The “day of Yahweh” is the day Yahweh would come to deliver His people, judge the wicked, and establish His rule on earth.³⁴ This looked forward to the day the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem (586 BC) and then to the worldwide judgement of Yahweh. Yahweh compared the destruction of Judah to an animal slaughtered in a ritual sacrifice. Yahweh would punish the leaders of Judah who worshiped idols and had become wealthy from their oppression of the poor. The phrase “all those who leap over the threshold” (Zeph. 1:9) is unclear and may refer to a Philistine pagan practice (see 1 Sam 5:5). On that day, a loud cry and wailing would go out from the people as they are plundered of their money and lands. The day of Yahweh’s anger was near—the sinful would be punished, and their money couldn’t save them.

2:1-3 Yahweh interrupted His judgment against the nations and called the nations to repent and cry out to Him before the judgment became a reality. They were to seek Him, humble themselves, and do what was right, so that they could be protected on the day of Yahweh.

2:4-15 Yahweh declared His judgment on nations representing the four points of the compass. In the west, the Philistine cities would be reduced to uninhabited ruins and used as pastures by the poor people of Judah that would be left behind. In the east, the Ammonites and Moabites (Gen. 19:30-38) would be annihilated like Sodom and Gomorrah, for they had insulted and attacked Judah. In the south, the Cushites of Ethiopia would be cut down by the sword. In the north, Nineveh of Assyria would be reduced to ruins and used for the grazing of flocks.

3:1-7 Yahweh then condemned Jerusalem for its disobedience, oppression, and refusal of correction. The leaders were hungry wolves who preyed upon the weak. The prophets were proud and deceitful. And the priests had defiled the temple of Yahweh and broken His laws. Yahweh lived in the city and was just. Yahweh was the one who destroyed the nations for their

³⁴ See notes on Amos 5:18-20.

sins because they did not respect Him or accept His correction. So He would pour out His fury on them, and the whole earth would be consumed.

The Day of Yahweh's Blessing (3:9-20)

In this division Yahweh announced that He would bring great blessing to all humankind after His judgment. He briefly revealed His plans for the nations and then spoke extensively about His plans for Israel.

3:9-12 A day will come when the nations will truly praise Yahweh and pray to Him. Then they will be ashamed of their rebellion and sin and will never again boast of their accomplishments. They will be humble and find safety in Yahweh.

3:13-20 The faithful remnant of Israel will not be deceitful, and they will live in peace. Zion will praise Yahweh for His removal of their judgment and for driving away their enemy. Yahweh will come and live in their midst to protect and deliver His people. In that day, Yahweh will deal with those who mistreated Israel. Yahweh will lead them, and they will be admired by the nations.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk was a pre-Babylonian prophet who ministered to Judah during 610–597 BC. He announced the coming of Babylon, who would take Judah into captivity. The book of Habakkuk is unique because it does not record the words of Habakkuk to the people but rather his questions to Yahweh and Yahweh's responses. The purpose of the book of Habakkuk was to pronounce the judgment on Israel and Babylon but also promise a future exodus for all nations.

The book of Habakkuk is arranged in two divisions: the interchange between Habakkuk and Yahweh (Hab. 1:1-2:20) and Habakkuk's hymn of praise to Yahweh (Hab. 3:1-19).

The Interchange Between Habakkuk and Yahweh (1:1-2:20)

In this division Habakkuk asked Yahweh two questions (Hab. 1:2-4; 1:12-2:1) to which Yahweh responded with two answers (Hab. 1:5-11; 2:2-5). Yahweh then ends with five woes to the wicked (Hab. 2:6-20).

1:1-4 The first question that Habakkuk asked Yahweh was why He was not doing anything about the evil and violence he saw in Judah. Everywhere he looked in Judah he saw violence, and he was crying out to Yahweh, but Yahweh was not responding. He accused Yahweh of being unjust in His lack of response.

1:5-11 Yahweh responded with the answer that He was doing something about the evil in Judah: He was sending the Babylonians to punish them. Yahweh was going to do something amazing, empowering the ruthless and greedy nation of Babylon to do His will. Yahweh described them as a terrifying and autonomous force that moves swiftly across the earth and swoops down on their prey. They intended to do violence and take the remaining nations as captives. They were more arrogant than those who went before them.

1:12-2:1 Habakkuk's response was to ask Yahweh how He could use an evil nation to righteously punish His people. Habakkuk acknowledged that Yahweh had been personally involved in the nation of Israel from their inception. He declared Yahweh to be immortal and too just to use an evil nation to do His righteous will. Yes, the Babylonians would punish the wicked, but what about the innocent people who would get swept up in the violence of the Babylonians? How could this be better than what was already happening in Judah? By allowing the Babylonians to build an empire, it seemed like Yahweh had little regard for human life and was not acting as their just king, like the fish and animals who have no king. Without a king, the people are like the fish, which are captured and pulled out of the water by the nets of the Babylonians. The people of the nations existed only to satisfy the appetite of the Babylonians. And the Babylonians did not even recognize themselves as the instrument of Yahweh. Despite his complaint against Yahweh, Habakkuk said he would wait patiently for Yahweh's response, like a watchman on the lookout tower.

2:2-5 Yahweh responded to Habakkuk by assuring him that His divine justice would prevail over the nations in the end. Even if it takes a while for this to be fulfilled, it would still happen, for the word of Yahweh is reliable and will come at just the right time. Those who desire evil will eventually collapse, but the person of integrity will be preserved from the coming judgment because of his faithfulness to Yahweh and His word (Hab. 2:4).

Hab. 2:4, traditionally translated “the righteous will live by faith,” should be understood more specific to this context than seen as a general theological statement about faith. The Hebrew

word *tsaddiyq* can mean “righteous” or “integrity.” In this context it refers to the oppressed people, who are people of integrity, in contrast to the wicked people of the culture (Hab. 1:4). The Hebrew word *'emunah* has traditionally been translated as “faith,” but nowhere else in the Bible does the term refer to “belief.” When used of human character and conduct, it carries the connotation of “honesty,” “integrity,” “reliability,” or “faithfulness.” The point is that the truly innocent people (“integrity”) will be preserved (“live”) from the coming judgment because of their godly lifestyle and loyalty (“faithfulness”) to Yahweh. In contrast, the wicked Israelites, and later the Babylonians, who were intoxicated with their own pride and appetite will fall.

Yahweh never really answered Habakkuk’s question of how He could justify using the Babylonians, but Yahweh did assure him based on His character and reputation that His righteousness would ultimately prevail over evil.

2:6-20 Yahweh went on to describe the eventual fall of Babylon. He stated that all the nations would one day taunt the Babylonian empire when they had fallen like all those before them.

Yahweh then gave five woes. First, woe on those who accumulate and get wealthy through extortion and oppression (Hab. 2:6b-8). Eventually others will turn on you.

Second, woe to the one who builds his house or nation on unjust gain, for he will die and will experience shame (Hab. 2:9-11). Their schemes will bring shame on their house, and they will self-destruct.

Third, woe to the one who builds his city on bloodshed, for everything he has gained will disappear like the smoke of a fire (Hab. 2:12-14). But the glory of Yahweh’s sovereignty will fill the earth and last forever.

Fourth, woe to the one who gets others drunk so that he can use them for his own gain (Hab. 2:15-17). For eventually it will be done to him as well, and he will drink the cup of Yahweh’s wrath. Idols are only wood and metal and are worthless for protecting the wicked from Yahweh’s wrath.

Woe to the one who tries to awaken an idol, looking to it for protection and guidance (Hab. 2:18-20). The idol has no life or speech, but the whole earth is speechless when they stand before the might and glory of Yahweh.

Habakkuk’s Hymn of Praise to Yahweh (3:1-19)

Even though Habakkuk did not fully understand Yahweh’s ways and reasoning, He responded with a total faith and commitment to Yahweh based on His character and reputation.

3:1-15 Habakkuk stood in awe of what Yahweh had done for Israel in the past and trusted Him to do the same again. He asked that Yahweh show His people mercy when the day of the Babylonians came. Habakkuk then looked back to the exodus and described Yahweh’s work of salvation in Egypt. He envisioned Yahweh coming from Teman, a city south of Edom, and Mount Paran, which is unknown. He comes filling all the sky and earth with the whirlwind of His glory and with lightning shooting out of Him. He brought plagues down on Egypt, shook the earth, and filled the nations with fear.

Habakkuk asked if Yahweh was angry with creation when He climbed into His chariot to go to war. Yahweh caused the flooding of waters, the deep waters to rise up, and the waters of the sky to come down. The sun and the moon stand still in awe of the power of Yahweh as He treads the

earth and the nations. Then Yahweh delivers His people in the exodus and defeats the pharaoh of Egypt. Israel celebrates the victory of Yahweh as He tramples the sea, which represents the chaos of the world.

3:16-19 Having remembered the past deeds of Yahweh, Habakkuk was filled with fear at the awesomeness of Yahweh and His divine anger. He knew that the Yahweh of the past was still active in the present and ready to destroy the evil and chaos of the world and deliver His people. So even though right now there may be no abundance of figs, olives, grain, sheep, or cattle, Habakkuk would rejoice in Yahweh and be filled with joy that Yahweh is a God who is able to rule the world with order and deliver His people.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a pre-Babylonian prophet who ministered to Judah (southern kingdom) during 627–580 BC, during the reigns of the final kings of Judah: Josiah (640–609 BC), Jehoahaz (609 BC), Jehoiakim (609–598 BC), Jehoiachin (597 BC), and Zedekiah (597–586 BC). The purpose of the book of Jeremiah was to proclaim the coming of Babylon as judgment but also to promise to restore Israel with a new heart.

The book of Jeremiah is arranged in three major divisions. In Jer. 1:1-25:38 the focus is on the impending doom of Judah's fall to the coming Babylonians. Jer. 26:1-45:5 is primarily biographical and covers the fall of Judah and the people being taken into captivity in 586 BC. And Jer. 46:12-52:34 are the oracles of Jeremiah that develop the theme of worldwide judgment that was introduced in Jer. 25:14-38:28.

On the Brink of Disaster (1:1-25:38)

This division begins with Jeremiah's call to be a prophet of Yahweh (Jer. 1:1-19). This is followed by five speeches of Jeremiah (Jer. 2:1-6:30; 7:1-10; 11:1-12; 13:1-17; 18:1-19:13), which are introduced with a reference that Jeremiah was receiving a word from Yahweh. Then there is a narrative where Jeremiah is referred to in the third person (Jer. 19:14-20:6) and a confession of the prophet (Jer. 20:7-18). This is followed by another lengthy speech (Jer. 21:1-23). This division ends with two messages dated to specific time periods (Jer. 24:1-25:38).

1:1-19 Jeremiah was a priest who was called to be a prophet in the thirteenth year of Josiah of Judah. Jeremiah objected by stating that he was not eloquent and was too young. Yahweh responded by saying that He was with him and then touched Jeremiah's mouth, giving him the authority and ability to speak the will of Yahweh to the people.

To convince Jeremiah that he had been given the ability to be a prophet, Yahweh gave him two visions. In the first vision, he saw a branch of an “almond tree” (*shaqed*) to illustrate that Yahweh was “watching” (*shoqed*) the events of Judah to assure the fulfillment of His word (Jer. 1:11-12). In the second vision, Jeremiah saw a pot of boiling water tipped away from the north, symbolizing the northern army of Babylon that would come and destroy Judah (Jer. 1:13-16). Yahweh then called Jeremiah to speak this message to the people of Judah. He told Jeremiah that people would attack him but that He would not allow anything to overcome Jeremiah.

2:1-8 Jer. 2:1-6:30 is the first speech of Jeremiah. Yahweh portrayed Himself as a husband and Israel as His bride. The fond memories He had of Israel are exaggerated, for from the very beginning of Israel's formation they rebelled against Yahweh (Ex. 32; Num. 13-14). Yahweh is making the point that compared to now, Israel was obedient in the beginning.

Yahweh declared that Israel had no fault with Yahweh that they could bring against Him, but they had gone after other gods. Yahweh brought them to a land of abundance and dwelt with them, yet their priests did not seek Him out for guidance, and they worshiped idols.

2:9-19 Yahweh told Judah to search east and west and show him anyone who had changed their gods throughout their history. They would find no one, yet Israel had exchanged the glorious Yahweh for simple idols. All of creation is dumbfounded by Israel. Yahweh had not made Israel a slave but His special possession. But because of their rebellion Yahweh had allowed nations from all around them to attack them. So, what good would it do them to seek Egypt for protection? They would be punished for their wickedness.

2:20-37 Israel had rejected Yahweh long ago and, like a prostitute, given themselves over to many other gods. The stain of their guilt was obvious to all and could not be washed away. Yahweh said they were like a female camel or donkey in heat, running everywhere desperately looking for another animal to mate with (Jer. 2:23-24).

Israel responded by saying that Yahweh was wasting His time pursuing them, for they loved their gods and would not turn away from them. But just as a thief has to face dishonor before he changes, so would Israel (Jer. 2:25-27). But their gods were only wooden idols. Therefore, Israel turned to Yahweh only when they were in need, and then they went back to their idols. Yahweh now said to Israel of their idols, “Let them save you” (Jer. 2:28-29).

Yahweh asked Judah if He had been a barren wilderness to them, not providing for them. A bride is thoughtful with her appearance and her jewelry as she prepares to go to her husband, so Israel should have been eager to go to Yahweh. Yet they chased after other lovers. Israel said they had done nothing wrong, but Yahweh would bring them down in judgment.

3:1-5 Yahweh reminded Judah that if a divorced woman remarried, then she could not return back to her first husband (Deut. 24:1-4). How much more would this be true of Israel, who had prostituted themselves to other gods. They defiled the land with their prostitution, so Yahweh withheld the rain. Then Israel had the audacity to blame Yahweh for their suffering. They asked Him if He would always be angry, to which Yahweh replied that they always do evil.

3:6-11 Yahweh came to Jeremiah and told him how Israel had prostituted herself to gods, but even after that He thought that Israel would have come back to Him. So, Yahweh gave her divorce papers and sent her into exile. But her sister, Judah, saw this and did not learn the lesson, and she too was now acting as an adulterous woman, prostituting herself to the gods. Therefore, Israel could be seen as less guilty than Judah because Judah saw what happened to Israel and did not change.

3:12-18 Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to shout to Judah to come back and be faithful to Yahweh, for He is a merciful God who would forgive if they repented. Yahweh is her true master. If they repented, He would not only bring them home, but He would give them new leaders who would be faithful to Yahweh and lead the nation faithfully. In that day, no one will think about, talk about, or need the Ark of the Covenant anymore, for Yahweh would literally dwell with them in the city of Jerusalem. Not only that, but the nations would all gather together with Israel in Jerusalem, and He would dwell with them all. Yahweh would also change the hearts of His people so they would no longer think or do evil. And Israel and Judah would be reunited in the land. Yahweh is talking about the second coming of Christ, when He brings His kingdom to earth, defeats all the evil nations of the world, and brings all believers together under His rule. These believers will be people from all the nations, whose hearts have been transformed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ.

3:19-4:4 Yahweh desired to treat Judah like a true son and give them the most fruitful land, but they had been unfaithful. Now He was calling them back to Him to experience life with Him. In order to come back, they had to get rid of their idols and live in a righteous way. They must make an effort to pursue a relationship with Him. They had to have their hearts circumcised (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). Circumcision of the male genitalia was the outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant. The male and female genitalia are the only organs in the human body that produce both life (seed/egg) and death (urine). The idea is that if one is not marked by Yahweh, then the flesh can produce only death. But if one is marked by Yahweh, then one can produce life and

blessings. Yahweh commands Abraham and his descendants to cut off this part of their flesh, or they would be cut off from the covenant blessings. They would be without life. Spiritually, it would have been a frequent reminder to every circumcised male of Yahweh's promises involving seed and a symbol that they had repudiated "the flesh" in favor of trust in Yahweh and His spiritual promises.

In Deut. 10:16 and 30:6 Moses used circumcision in order to make these points about the heart. Yahweh created humans in His image and chose Israel to live righteously, to expand His garden/kingdom, and to be a blessing to others. However, Moses made the point in Deuteronomy that humanity and Israel would never be able to do this because their hearts were corrupted with sin and thus produced death rather than life (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 9:25; 17:9; Ezek. 11:19). The Bible makes it clear that the hearts of all humanity are evil (Ecc. 9:3; Jer. 17:9). Therefore, Israel's heart would have to change, would have to be circumcised, so that they could produce righteousness and life and be able to obey the commands of Yahweh. But because they could never do this, it would have to be God who circumcised and transformed their hearts. Spiritual circumcision (cleansing of the heart) signifies more internally a commitment to be conformed and obedient to the will of Yahweh (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26). It was not the outward sign of the covenant that was important but the inward attitude of those who were renewing their allegiance to Yahweh (Deut. 10:16).

The First Testament looked forward to the day Yahweh would come and give Israel a new heart so that they could produce life (Deut. 10:10-16; 30:6; Ps. 51:10-12; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:17-19). Paul later makes the point that it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that performs the circumcision of the heart and transforms the believer into a new person (Rom. 2:29; 8:1-8; 12:1-2). Only with the Holy Spirit is true Israel able to desire, love, and obey Yahweh, producing life and becoming a blessing to the world in the way Yahweh and Deuteronomy envisioned.

4:5-13 Yahweh then declared to all of Judah to run for safety, for He was bringing disaster from the north that would bring destruction to Judah. Jeremiah then responded by saying that Yahweh had allowed the people to think they would be safe when in fact they were not (Jer. 4:10). Judah was told that the whirlwind of Yahweh's judgment was going to come down upon them and destroy them. Judah was not to think that this was a gentle breeze of judgment, for it would be the whirlwind of His chariots coming to destroy them.

4:14-18 Yahweh called Judah to wash their hearts of evil so that they could be delivered from the coming judgment. The enemy is coming and will surround the city because Judah has rebelled against Yahweh and lived in wickedness.

4:19-31 Jeremiah was filled with anguish and sorrow at the news of what Yahweh was bringing. Yahweh responded with the point that this was happening because of the evil of Judah. Jeremiah lamented the moral failure of his people. He then described the coming judgment as leaving the land formless and empty—as it was described before Yahweh created the earth (Gen. 1:2). This happened as a result of Yahweh's judgment. Jeremiah then described how the people would flee the land in terror as the invading armies descended upon them.

5:1-19 The certainty of Judah's doom is made clear when Yahweh sarcastically challenged Jerusalem to find one person who was righteous, then it would be saved. Even when Jerusalem was disciplined, they refused to repent. This is why Yahweh would not forgive them and the invaders would be allowed to come. Even while they were being disciplined, they declared falsely that no judgment from Yahweh would come (Jer. 5:12-13). Yahweh would bring the

unstoppable Babylonians who would devastate everything in the land and the people (Jer. 5:14-17). Yet, because of His covenant promises, Yahweh would not completely destroy them (Jer. 5:18). Ironically, those who served foreign gods would now serve a foreign nation.

5:20-31 The people of Judah were spiritually blind. They should have feared Yahweh, the one who had established a boundary for the raging sea, so that it could not destroy the land. In the Bible the raging sea symbolizes the forces of chaos that threaten to undo the created order. Yahweh was reminding them of His ability to protect them and also bring judgment upon them. Instead, they rebelled against Him and sought to hurt and oppress others for their own gain. Even the prophets and the priests, who were established by Yahweh, ruled by their own authority.

6:1-9 It was time to flee Jerusalem, for the judgment of Yahweh was coming. Yahweh then commanded Babylon to come and attack the city and to glean the remaining people in the city like one gleans the grape vine (Jer. 6:9).

6:10-15 Jeremiah lamented the fact that the people were not listening because they were hard hearted. This frustration and anger filled him with the wrath of Yahweh and made him want to strike out against the people. Yahweh then gave him permission to pour this anger out on the people for their hard-hearted rebellion (Jer. 6:11). Yahweh would then respond by destroying their houses. All the people from the least to the greatest were greedy and corrupt. They acted like their sin was no big deal and proclaimed peace. They had no shame for anything they did. Therefore, they deserved to be disciplined.

6:16-21 Yahweh tried to get the people's attention by sending watchmen (prophets) to warn them of the coming judgment for their sins. But they did not listen, so they would reap the judgment of Yahweh for violating His law. They thought their sacrifices would make Yahweh happy, but He did not care about their sacrifices because they were not obedient (Jer. 6:20).

6:22-30 Yahweh declared that Judah should mourn because the Babylonian army was coming to destroy them. Jeremiah was to be like a tester of metals who, like one burning ore, was to burn the people with an intense fire in order to burn away their impurities. The people were not like silver, however, but like bronze and iron, from which impurities could not be burned away despite the intensity of the judgment of fire (Jer. 6:27-30).

7:1-29 Yahweh told Jeremiah to stand by the gate to the temple and warn the people against the lies that they were safe from the judgment of Yahweh. The people believed they were safe from the judgment of Yahweh that would come on Israel because they had the temple of Yahweh. However, the only thing that would spare them from Yahweh's judgment was repenting from their sins and abandoning their evil practice of idolatry and oppression of the poor. Yahweh condemned them for living a lifestyle of evil and then sacrificing in the temple, thinking they were safe from Yahweh's judgment (Jer. 7:9-11). Rituals did not excuse immoral behavior.

Just as Eli, as priest (1 Sam. 1-3), thought he was safe because he served in the tabernacle at Shiloh, but Yahweh abandoned Shiloh to judgment because of the sin of the house of Eli (1 Sam. 4; Ps. 78:60), Yahweh would abandon Jerusalem because of the sin of Judah (Jer. 7:12-15).

Unlike in the past, when Yahweh had forgiven Israel due to the intercession of righteous leaders (Ex. 32:7-14; Amos 7:1-6), Yahweh told Jeremiah not to pray for the people of Judah, for their sins were too great (Jer. 7:16-19).

Yahweh sarcastically told them to burn and eat all their sacrificed meat. Yahweh reminded them that He had told them to obey Him (Jer. 7:21-24). But they had not obeyed Him since the day

they left Egypt. Yahweh told Jeremiah that the people would not listen to him, just as they had never listened (Jer. 7:27-28).

7:30-8:3 The people had committed the evil practices of setting up idols in the temple and high places and sacrificed their children to the pagan gods. This was something Yahweh had never commanded, nor had it ever entered His mind to do so. The judgment that was coming was so great that their land would be known as the Valley of Slaughter, for it would become a mass burial site. The tombs of the dead would be desecrated and exposed to the heavenly lights that they had once worshipped (Jer. 8:1-2). And those who survived would beg for death.

8:4-13 Yahweh had waited for the people to repent, but they had refused to come back to Him and clung to their deceit and wickedness. Even the birds instinctively know when it is time to migrate in accordance with the natural order established by Yahweh, but Judah did not know or obey Yahweh's moral order established through His Law (Jer. 8:7). The people claimed they were wise because they had the Law, but in fact they were not because they did not know or do the law. Therefore, since they had rejected the Law and had no shame, Yahweh was going to bring disaster upon them (Jer. 8:9-12).

8:14-9:2 Jeremiah switches to the voice of the people as they anticipated the invasion Yahweh had announced. Their false confidence had been crushed as they cried out in panic to flee the invaders who were coming as a result of their sin against Yahweh. They had hoped for peace but now had only an invading army (Jer. 8:14-17). Jeremiah then expressed his grief over the coming destruction, but he trusted in Yahweh as his comforter (Jer. 8:18-9:2).

9:3-10 Yahweh provided more examples of the people's sin. They were so full of deceit and slander that they even mistreated and turned on their friends. Therefore, Yahweh had to purify them of their sin (Jer. 9:7-9). Though Jeremiah knew Yahweh was just, he wept over the coming judgment (Jer. 9:10-11).

9:11-25 Jeremiah asked why it was necessary to destroy Judah (Jer. 9:12). Yahweh responded by stating that the people had violated His law and worshiped idols, so He would scatter them among the nations and their gods (Jer. 9:13-16).

Yahweh then told the people to mourn the coming disaster and to encourage all others to do so (Jer. 9:17-21). Yahweh told His people not to boast in their own wisdom, strength, and wealth, but in knowing Him. He is the only relational God who is kind, righteous, and just and delights in others who demonstrate these qualities (Jer. 9:23-24).

10:1-16 Yahweh told His people to not act like the pagan nations. They cut down trees and then turned them into idols that had to be carried and supported. In contrast, no one is like Yahweh in His power and greatness, for He is a living and eternal King who can act justly upon the nations. Unlike the pagan gods, Yahweh created the world and the people of it.

10:17-25 Because the people had turned to worthless idols instead of to the living God, Yahweh was going to hurl them out of His land of blessing, for the people were a sickness in the land. Jeremiah mourned the open wound in the land of his people because the people were without a true Shepherd (Jer. 10:19-25).

11:1-17 Yahweh cursed the people for not obeying the law that He had given them after He delivered them from Egypt. Their obedience would be blessed with living in the land of milk and honey. From the time Yahweh brought the people out of Egypt, He warned them to obey Him, but they did not listen, so He cursed them for their rebellion. Yet they continued in their

rebellion, so Yahweh was going to remove them from the land of blessing. Again, Yahweh commanded Jeremiah not to pray for the people because their evil had gone too far.

11:18-23 Jeremiah's message of judgment was so unpatriotic against Jerusalem's message of prosperity and peace, many people plotted to kill him. Yahweh revealed their plot to Jeremiah and protected him. Then Yahweh declared that He would punish the people of Anathoth with the sword for trying to kill His anointed prophet and silence the word of Yahweh.

12:1-17 Jeremiah praised Yahweh for being a righteous God but accused him of being unjust with Israel. He presented his case of the wicked prospering and Yahweh not punishing them. He was not completely satisfied with the way Yahweh was going to deal with the people of Anathoth because the evil in Judah was so much bigger than just Anathoth. Jeremiah asked that Yahweh drag the wicked off to be slaughtered like a lamb (Jer. 12:1-4).

Yahweh responded with a rebuke, using the analogy of running to say that if Jeremiah could not even handle the wicked people of Anathoth, then how would he handle the opposition to him when it increased. Yahweh revealed that the betrayal to Jeremiah was greater than he thought; it even included his family (Jer. 12:5-6). Yahweh then said He would abandon them and ruin their inheritance (Jer. 12:7-17).

13:1-14 Yahweh told Jeremiah to buy a belt, wear it, bury it, and then unbury it. Jeremiah saw that the belt was ruined and useless. Yahweh said this was what he was going to do to Jerusalem. For Yahweh had bound Israel and Judah to Himself like a belt around the waist, but they had abandoned Him (Jer. 13:1-11). Yahweh then said that He was, in judgment, going to fill Judah as one would fill wine jars, but with drunken stupor instead of prosperity and joy, and then smash them against one another (Jer. 13:12-14).

13:15-27 Yahweh told Judah to turn to Him and give Him glory before He caused them to fall and bring down their king and queens and their cities (Jer. 13:15-19). If they asked why this happened, then He would answer that it was because of their sin and adulterous worship. Therefore, He would scatter them with the army of the Babylonians.

14:1-22 Yahweh said He was going to bring famine to the land (Jer. 14:1-6). Speaking on behalf of the people, Jeremiah confessed their sins and repented (Jer. 14:7-9). Again, Yahweh told Jeremiah not to pray for them since they were so hard hearted and would not listen (Jer. 14:11-13). Jeremiah complained that the prophets were telling the people that they would have peace. Yahweh condemned them for their lies (Jer. 14:14-16). Yahweh then told Judah to not be filled with joy at the false message of peace but to mourn the coming destruction.

15:1-21 Yahweh said that even if Moses (Ex. 32:7-14) and Samuel (1 Sam. 7:1-14) interceded for Judah He would not relent from His judgment against this wicked people. Yahweh said that if Judah asked, "Where should we go?" then Jeremiah was to sarcastically tell them that they could die by the sword and be consumed by the wild animals (Jer. 15:1-4). No one would have pity on Judah because they had rejected Him (Jer. 15:5-6). He then described their destruction again (Jer. 15:7-14). Jeremiah continued to complain that his ministry was too hard to handle. He had denied himself so many comforts and had suffered as a result. Yahweh was unreliable in protecting him (Jer. 15:15-18). Yahweh told him to repent of his thinking and to not fall into the thinking of the sinful nation around him. Yahweh did not make Jeremiah's life easier but did promise to protect him from destruction (Jer. 15:19-21).

16:1-21 Yahweh told Jeremiah not to marry or have children in light of the coming judgment (Jer. 16:1-4). He was not to go to funerals or celebrations because Yahweh had removed His blessing from the land (Jer. 16:5-9). When the people asked, “Why would Yahweh punish us?” then Jeremiah was to tell them it was because they violated His law, worshiped idols, and behaved wickedly (Jer. 16:10-13). However, Yahweh promised to bring them out of exile and restore them (Jer. 16:14-15). But until then, Yahweh was going to send for the fishermen and hunters (Babylonians) to catch Judah and take them into exile. Yahweh would teach Judah that He is the only true God (Jer. 16:16-21).

17:1-18 Yahweh condemned Judah for their idolatry. Their idolatry was an attempt to ensure their prosperity from the gods, but instead Yahweh would hand them and their wealth over to foreign invaders (Jer. 17:1-4). Yahweh declared that those who trusted in humans to bring them prosperity and protection would end up dying in the wastelands. But those who trust in Yahweh would be like a tree planted by water (Jer. 17:5-8). This would have been a challenge to the righteous and to Jeremiah to maintain their faith in Yahweh. Yahweh warned against trusting one’s own heart. He knows the heart and judges all accordingly (Jer. 17:9-11).

In response, Jeremiah praised Yahweh. He acknowledged the doomed fate of those who rejected Yahweh. He begged Yahweh to heal him as a metaphor of deliverance from those who were trying to kill him (Jer. 17:12-18).

17:19-27 Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to go from gate to gate and to command the people to keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a time of entering Yahweh’s presence and resting in Him as their only source of life and satisfaction. Yahweh knew that all of Judah’s sins were a result of their corrupted hearts and not having a relationship with Him. If they would repent and return to a true Sabbath observance, then He would change their hearts. But if they did not, they would be destroyed with an unquenchable fire.

18:1-10 Yahweh sent Jeremiah to watch a potter work at the wheel. The potter was working on a pot that was marred, so the potter had to destroy it and start all over. Yahweh declared that this was true of how He works with nations. If He has fashioned a nation into a pot to be destroyed and they repent, then He will refashion them into a pot of prosperity. But if He has fashioned a nation into a pot of prosperity but they rebel against Him, then He will refashion them into a pot to be destroyed. In other words, not all of Yahweh’s announcements of His intentions for a nation are unconditional. Yahweh is willing to change His plans based on the will of the clay.

18:11-23 In the case of Judah, Yahweh had fashioned them into a pot of destruction, and they had not repented, for they had forgotten Yahweh and chose to continue in their rebellion (Jer. 18:11-17). So, Yahweh was going to destroy them. The people were so evil that they planned to kill Jeremiah, Yahweh’s prophet, for the message of destruction he was proclaiming (Jer. 18:18-23). Jeremiah prayed that these people would be destroyed for their plot of murder.

19:1-13 Yahweh told Jeremiah to buy a clay jar and take it to the Potsherd Gate in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, which was on the southwest side of the city of Jerusalem, and to preach a message of destruction to the people for their idolatry and social injustice. Then Jeremiah was to break the jar as if it were Judah. The Valley of Ben Hinnom would become a valley of slaughter.

19:14-20:7 Jeremiah then went to the temple and preached the same message. When the Pashhur, the priest, heard Jeremiah, he had him beaten and put in stocks. The next day when Jeremiah was released, he sarcastically told Pashhur, “Terror on every side,” for the horror of

destruction that was about to come. Passur along with all the people in Jerusalem would be taken into exile.

20:8-18 Jeremiah was shaken by his suffering and humiliation and cried out to Yahweh. He accused Yahweh of deceiving him, for this was not what he had signed up for. Being Yahweh's prophet had caused people to turn against him. Jeremiah felt like quitting but then began to praise Yahweh for His goodness, for He was always with Jeremiah (Jer. 20:8-13). But then Jeremiah quickly fell back into depression and wanted to die (Jer. 18:14-18).

21:1-14 After Babylon had attacked Jerusalem in 588 BC, King Zedekiah (597–586 BC) sent envoys to Jeremiah to inquire of Yahweh what he should do. Jeremiah responded by telling them that Yahweh was going to hand them all over to the Babylonians. Then Yahweh would hand Zedekiah and his officials over to Nebuchadnezzar II to be killed (Jer. 21:1-7). But Yahweh was offering the people in the city a chance to escape death—if they fled the city and surrendered to the Babylonians (Jer. 21:8-12). Yahweh declared that He was against Jerusalem for their injustice.

22:1-10 Yahweh told Jeremiah to go to the palace and proclaim a message of repentance to Zedekiah and his officials. If they turned back to Yahweh and sought to take care of and defend the poor, weak, and oppressed, then Yahweh would restore them and protect them from the coming Babylonians, for Yahweh was about to make them a wasteland. And when the nations asked why Yahweh had allowed Judah's destruction, His answer would be because they had forsaken their covenant with Yahweh.

22:11-30 These verses take place before the previous chapters because Jeremiah was called to preach against the kings who preceded Zedekiah. Yahweh told Jeremiah to preach against Jehoahaz (Shallum) (609 BC) in Jer. 22:11-17, Jehoiakim (Eliakim) (609–598 BC) in Jer. 22:18-23, and Jehoiachin (Coniah) (597 BC) in Jer. 22:24-30. Yahweh had made them great kings, but they chose to use their power for their own gain at the expense of the people. So, Yahweh would bring them down for their abuse of power.

23:1-8 Yahweh then declared judgment against all the shepherds (kings) for destroying and scattering His flock (the people). However, Yahweh, the true Shepherd, would bring His flock back from exile and restore them to the Promised Land. Yahweh would then raise up a descendant of David who would rule with true justice over Yahweh's people (Jer. 23:5-8). Yahweh would then be known for delivering His people from exile and not for delivering them from Egypt.

23:9-40 Jeremiah then mourned that fact that all the leaders in the land were morally corrupt, and Yahweh declared that they would be destroyed. Yahweh would destroy the prophets who spoke falsely about His ways. None of them had ever stood in the divine council of Yahweh, yet they had spoken arrogantly as if they had. They proclaimed that they had dreams that pointed them to Baal, and they thought they could make the people forget about Yahweh. Yet it would be Yahweh who would make them no more.

24:1-10 Sometime after 597 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar II deported King Jehoiachin (597 BC) and other officials from Judah to Babylon, Yahweh used two baskets of figs to teach Jeremiah a lesson. One basket contained good figs, and the other contained bad figs. The good figs represented those who had recently been taken into exile. Yahweh would bless their descendants in exile, transform them into a repentant people, and bring them back to the Promised Land. The

bad figs represented Zedekiah and the others who were left in Judah, whom Yahweh had rejected and would throw away.

25:1-14 In 605 BC, the fourth year of King Jehoiakim (609–598 BC), Yahweh formally announced the coming of the Babylonian exile. Yahweh sent many prophets to warn Judah, but they did not listen. Therefore, He was sending the Babylonians to destroy them. Yahweh then declared that when seventy years had passed Yahweh would punish Babylon and allow them to be enslaved. Then Yahweh would return the Israelites back to their land. The Israelites were first deported in 605 BC and again in 597 BC, and the last of them were carried off in 586 BC. They returned to the land in 539 BC. This means they were in exile for 66, 58, or 47 years, depending on which date one uses. Thus, the seventy years is either a metaphor for a long time, or Yahweh mercifully brought them back sooner.

25:15-38 Yahweh declared that a day was coming when He would unleash His judgment on all the nations, and they would all be destroyed. He compared His wrath to a cup of wine, which He would make all the nations drink. In contrast to the drunk and staggering nations, Yahweh would roar like a lion from His throne and unleash His judgment.

The Fall and Captivity of Judah (26:1-45:5)

This division is primarily biographical and covers the fall of Judah and the people being taken into captivity in 586 BC.

26:1-24 Early in the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598 BC), Yahweh instructed Jeremiah to confront the people who came to worship in the temple and warn them of the destruction that was to come if they did not repent and obey the covenant. When Jeremiah preached this message, the priests and prophets seized him and put him on trial. The officials declared that Jeremiah should not be put to death for speaking the will of Yahweh. The officials then reported that Jeremiah was not the first prophet to relate a message of judgment from Yahweh. Micah had come to Hezekiah (715–698 BC), and he had repented. In contrast, Uriah had come to Jehoiakim (609–598 BC) and had been killed. The officials decided not to kill Jeremiah.

27:1-22 In 594 BC, in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign (597–586 BC), Yahweh told Jeremiah to strap a yoke to his neck and preach His message to the people. Jeremiah was to tell the people that Yahweh was giving all the nations over to the Babylonians' rule. If any nation refused to be yoked under the rule of Babylon, then Yahweh would kill them with famine, plagues, and the sword. They were not to listen to the false prophets, who preached peace for the nations. Jeremiah faithfully preached this message to the king, officials, and the people.

28:1-17 Hananiah falsely prophesied that Yahweh said He was going to break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar II and within two years would bring back all the articles Nebuchadnezzar II had taken from the temple. He claimed that Yahweh would also bring back Jehoiachin (597 BC) who had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar and imprisoned in Babylon.

Jeremiah responded by saying it would be great if Yahweh did that, but all the many prophets who had come before them had prophesied in agreement with Jeremiah—that Judah would be destroyed. Therefore, the prophet who prophesies peace can be trusted only if it comes true.

Hananiah then broke the yoke that Jeremiah was wearing as symbol of his prophecy. Yahweh then told Jeremiah to tell Hananiah that he would receive an iron yoke for opposing Yahweh's prophet and would die that year. This was fulfilled two months later.

29:1-23 Jeremiah wrote a letter to those who had already been carried into exile in Babylon. The letter encouraged them to settle down, to become a part of the cities in Babylon, and to marry and have children, increasing in number. He then encouraged them to pray for and promote the prosperity of the city. They would remain in Babylon for the remainder of their lives. They were not to listen to the prophets who promised them a quick release from exile. When the appointed time was over, Yahweh would deliver them and bring them back to the Promised Land. The Babylonian exile was a mere delay in Yahweh's plans for His people. Ahab and Zedekiah (not the king) were spreading lies in Babylon—that they would be returning home soon. The Israelites living in Babylon were to curse these two men for their false hope.

29:24-32 When Jeremiah's letter arrived in Babylon, Shemaiah, another false prophet in Babylon, objected to Jeremiah's words. He wrote to Zephaniah, the head of the temple, that he should arrest Jeremiah. When Zephaniah informed Jeremiah of Shemaiah's accusation, Yahweh responded to Shemaiah through Jeremiah, His true prophet. Jeremiah told the exiles that Yahweh would punish Shemaiah for his lies and that he and his family would not live to see the day of Israel's return.

30:1-24 Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to gather into a book all the words Yahweh had spoken to him. Yahweh was bringing a judgment upon Judah that would be so great it would make even the strongest collapse in fear (Jer. 30:5-7). But Yahweh would one day free His people from the power of foreign nations, and they would be ruled by the new David (Jer. 30:8-9).

Yahweh acknowledged that Jerusalem was wounded and forgotten as a result of their punishment for their sins. But Yahweh promised that He would also punish those who had hurt them (Jer. 30:12-17). Yahweh promised to restore them and their prosperity. He would increase their numbers once again, and they would be ruled by one of their own. Yahweh would accomplish all He had promised (Jer. 30:18-24).

31:1-26 Yahweh promised to restore both Judah and Israel because He loved them (Jer. 31:1-6). Yahweh encouraged His people to sing for joy for the day they would return to the Promised Land. Yahweh would make them like a well-watered garden, and they would prosper again (Jer. 31:7-14). Yahweh would do this because they belonged to Him and because He loved them (Jer. 31:15-20).

31:27-40 Yahweh declared that He would plant both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah back in the Promised Land. Using a proverb, the people accused Yahweh of unfairly punishing them for the sins of their ancestors (Jer. 31:29). Though it is true that children do suffer the consequences of their parents' sins (Jer. 11:22-23), they faultily believed that they were innocent of the sins for which Yahweh had punished them (Jer. 3:25; 16:10-13; 32:18-19). Once the people repented of this thinking (Jer. 31:18-19), they would see and acknowledge that Yahweh fairly judges each individual (Jer. 31:30). Yahweh was not saying He was now going to punish people for their own sins, unlike in the past when He judged people for their father's sins. The beginning of Jer. 31:30 is elliptical and should read, "Instead [they will say]..." meaning there will be a change in the peoples' perception of Yahweh's judgments, not a change in His policies.³⁵

Yahweh then announced that the new era would come with a new covenant. Yahweh specifically stated that He would make a new covenant with Israel, not renew or ratify the Mosaic Covenant. This new covenant would be a different and better covenant, not like the old one. The old Mosaic

³⁵ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 195.

Covenant could not change the hearts of the Israelites or prevent the rebellion in the wilderness that led to their judgment of death. The Law demanded perfection but did not give a person the power to meet the requirements of perfection. Therefore, judgment *always* came to those who lived under the Law (Jer. 31:31-32). The people constantly violated the old covenant despite Yahweh's love for them.

The new covenant would be better in that the law would no longer be an external, powerless list of regulations; rather, it would be a living power engraved on their living minds and hearts rather than on lifeless stone tablets. Because of this, they would become even more intimately connected to Yahweh (Jer. 31:33). This involves more than just memorization of the Law, which was already present in the old covenant (Deut. 6:6-9). Memorization without the Holy Spirit's indwelling did not guarantee putting into action the truths and commands of God written in the Law. The people's hearts were so hardened and engraved with sin, they could not put God's Law into practice (Jer. 17:1). Now, their hearts would be changed and empowered by the Holy Spirit as their new and living law (Ezek. 11:18-21; Joel 2:28-29; Hosea 2:14-20). The statement "I will be their God and they will be my people" (Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 26:17-18) was the whole point of the Law. But now, with Christ, it could be applied on a greater level (2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3).

Under the old covenant only the prophets knew the will of Yahweh because only the prophet was on the divine council of Yahweh. Only the prophets could teach the people what the will of Yahweh was (Jer. 31:34a). Therefore, when the prophet failed to correctly communicate Yahweh's will, then all the people suffered and went astray. Thus, the law failed to lead the people in the ways of Yahweh. The New Covenant, however, through the superior sacrifice of the blood of Jesus as High Priest, would bring the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to all people (Joel 2:28-29) so that Israel would not need to be taught to know Yahweh since He would be actively residing and speaking in them (Jer. 31:34b). This does not mean that there is no place for teachers or that people are self-sufficient in their understanding of Yahweh (Heb. 10:25). Rather, one no longer needs someone (a priest) to mediate his relationship with Yahweh. There is no special class of Christian who has an inside track with Yahweh. This is why Paul refers to believers as different body parts of the same body.

Through this new covenant, Israel's sin will be completely dealt with, and there will be no more judgment (Jer. 31:34c; see also Rom. 8:1). People could receive forgiveness under the Mosaic Covenant if they threw themselves on the mercy of Yahweh (2 Sam. 11-12; Ps. 51). However, the Mosaic Covenant made no provision for a lasting forgiveness of sins. This is made possible only through the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-27), which is able to save Israel completely (Heb. 7:25).

Yahweh concludes His promise of a new covenant with a word of assurance: His commitment to honor His promises to Israel is as sure as the cycles of nature are firmly set in place. And it is as impossible for Him to reject His people as it is for a human to measure the extent of the heavens and the depths of the sea (Jer. 31:35-37). Restoration would come, highlighted by the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 31:38-40).

32:1-44 In 587 BC Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem, and Zedekiah (597–586 BC) had Jeremiah arrested and confined to the royal guard's courtyard for speaking a bad fate for Jerusalem. However, Jeremiah had also spoken of a day of hope, when Judah would be restored back to the land. To emphasize this hope, Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to buy a plot of land

from his uncle before witnesses. The deed to the land was signed and placed in a clay jar by Jeremiah's friend Baruch. The point is that there would be no point to buy land if Yahweh was not going to truly return His people to the land.

32:17-25 Jeremiah then expressed his confusion to Yahweh. He began by praising Yahweh then recounting the event of Yahweh saving Israel from Egypt. He then recounted the sin of the people in the land and the fact that the Babylonians were going to overtake Judah. He finished with expressing his confusion that Yahweh would have him buy land if the Babylonians were going to carry them off into exile.

32:26-44 Yahweh responded by stating that nothing is too difficult for Him, that He was going to give Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar II for the evil they had done (Jer. 32:26-36a). But Yahweh would also restore Israel back to the Promised Land (Jer. 32:36b-44). Yahweh would make a new, everlasting covenant with Judah, and He would change their hearts so that they would be able to obey Him. Then He would make the land prosper once again.

33:1-26 Yahweh declared that He was going to ruin the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 33:1-5). However, He would eventually restore, heal, and forgive His people so that they might prosper again (Jer. 33:6-9). In those days Yahweh would restore the cut-down branch of David, and the city would be known as "Yahweh Our Righteous Savior." From that point on, the city would never fail to have a righteous Davidic king and priest (Jer. 33:14-18). Just as no one can break the cycle of the day and night, so Yahweh's covenant promise to Israel would never be broken (Jer. 33:19-26). Yahweh promised to restore both Israel and Judah.

34:1-7 Yahweh told Jeremiah to go to Zedekiah (597–586 BC) and announce against him that he would not survive the coming conquest of Babylon. But Yahweh also stated that Zedekiah would not die by the sword but peacefully. Most likely these were two possible prophecies that would be determined by whether or not Zedekiah resisted Nebuchadnezzar II.

34:8-22 Zedekiah and the officials of the city made a covenant before Yahweh that they would free their slaves, and they did. But then they went back on their word and took the slaves back. Yahweh then condemned them for violating the law of the sabbatical year, in which slaves were supposed to be let free after six years of service (Deut. 15:12). Yahweh would destroy them and scatter them like the pieces of the golden calf that Moses had destroyed.

35:1-19 Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to invite the nomadic Rekabites to join him in the temple and offer them wine. But they refused to drink the wine because they swore to not disobey their ancestor Johonadab, who had commanded them to not drink wine and not live as farmers. Yahweh used this as an illustration of obedient loyalty. The Rekabites were extremely loyal to the command of one of their human ancestors, so why could Judah not be loyal to the commands of Yahweh? Yahweh then blessed the Rekabites with the promise that they would always have someone from their tribe who would be part of the Abrahamic Covenant.

36:1-32 In 605 BC, in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598 BC), Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to write down all the words of His prophecy on a scroll in order to encourage the people to repent. Jeremiah dictated all the words to Baruch and then had him read the scroll in the temple. The city officials then commanded Baruch to sit before them and read the scroll to them. When they heard it, they told him that it had to be reported to King Jehoiakim, but they told him and Jeremiah to go into hiding first so that they would not die. When they had it read to Jehoiakim, he burned the pages as they were being read. The king showed no remorse

even though the official urged him not to burn the scroll. Yet he could not stop the word of Yahweh, for Yahweh had Jeremiah rewrite the scroll.

37:1-21 Zedekiah (597–586 BC) became king, and he and his family ignored the commands of Yahweh. Yet Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to pray to Yahweh on his behalf. During this time, Egypt came to support Judah against Babylon. Babylon then left the city of Jerusalem to attack the Egyptians.

Yahweh then sent Jeremiah to tell Zedekiah that Egypt would abandon Judah and go back to their land and that the Babylonians would then return to destroy the city of Jerusalem. After this, Jeremiah went to the tribal territory of Benjamin in the north to conduct business and was stopped by the royal guard. He was accused of deserting to the Babylonians, and they beat him and imprisoned him in a dungeon for a long time.

38:1-13 Jeremiah was most likely not out of custody but preaching to the people indirectly from his confinement. When the official heard that he was still preaching a message of surrendering to the Babylonians, they informed Zedekiah that Jeremiah had to be killed, so he gave Jeremiah into their hands. They had him thrown into a cistern filled with mud. But Ebed-Melek, another official, went to Zedekiah and convinced him that the men were acting wickedly towards Jeremiah and that he must be rescued. Zedekiah agreed to free Jeremiah. Ebed-Melek must have had some leverage with the king in order to change his mind.

38:14-28 Zedekiah then questioned Jeremiah for the truth of what was going to happen to him and swore that he would never allow Jeremiah to be harmed by anyone if he told him. Jeremiah told Zedekiah that he would be harmed by Nebuchadnezzar II if he surrendered to him. Zedekiah confessed that he was afraid that he would be mistreated by the Jews who had already been taken into Babylon—that they would mistreat him when he arrived in Babylon. Jeremiah assured him that that would not happen. Zedekiah made Jeremiah promise that he would not tell the officials what they had talked about.

39:1-18 In Zedekiah's ninth year (588 BC), Nebuchadnezzar II came back a third time and put Jerusalem under siege for three years. In 586 BC Babylon broke through the city wall, and Zedekiah and his army fled, but he was caught. He was then taken to Riblah, a military administrative center previously used by Assyria (2 Kgs. 23:33). Nebuchadnezzar II killed Zedekiah's sons, blinded him, and carried him off to Babylon in shackles. Zedekiah was succeeded by no one.

Nebuchadnezzar II then went to Jerusalem and burned down the temple, the palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. He deported the people of Jerusalem to Babylon, leaving only the poor, and also carried away all the valuables from the temple. Nebuchadnezzar II then appointed Gedaliah as governor. Gedaliah was a nobleman whose father served Josiah (2 Kgs. 22:12; Jer. 26:24) and whose grandfather was Josiah's scribe (2 Kgs. 22:8). Nebuchadnezzar II then commanded that Jeremiah not be harmed. Yahweh fulfilled the prophecy of disaster for those who disobeyed Him and took care of His faithful prophet. Yahweh also spared Ebed-Melek for his obedience to Him and willingness to defend Jeremiah.

40:1-6 Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's II army, freed Jeremiah and gave him the choice of staying or going to Babylon with him. Sensing that Jeremiah wanted to stay with his people, he gave him provisions and sent him to Gedaliah.

40:7-16 When the Jewish people left behind in Judah and the surrounding nations heard that Gedaliah had been put in charge, they returned to Judah and supported him. Johanan warned Gedaliah that Baalis king of the Ammonites had sent Ishmael to kill him, but Gedaliah did not believe them. Johanan offered to kill Ishmael, but Gedaliah did not allow it.

41:1-15 In the seventh month after the exile, Ishmael came with ten men to Gedaliah while he was eating and killed him, the men who supported him, and the Babylonian soldiers. When men came to mourn the death of Gedaliah, Ishmael pretended that he was mourning too and then killed seventy of them and threw them into the cistern. Ten of them bargained for their lives and offered him grain, so he let them live. No specific reason is given for why Ishmael killed Gedaliah and his men.

Ishmael then took captive the people of Mizpah, including Zedekiah's daughters, and set out for Ammon. However, when Johanan found out what he had done, he took many men with him and caught up with Ishmael at Gibeon. When Ishmael saw he was outnumbered, he let the captives go and escaped to Ammon.

41:16-43:7 Then Johanan took his men, and the freed captives went to Geruth Kimham with the intention of fleeing to Egypt because they were afraid of what Nebuchadnezzar II would do to them when he found out what Ishmael had done. Johanan went to Jeremiah to ask him to pray on their behalf. They told Jeremiah that they had tried to live a life in obedience to Yahweh and wanted to know what to do.

Ten days later Yahweh told Jeremiah what to say to them. Yahweh said that if they stayed in the land of Judah and trusted Him, He would plant them and build them up in the land, for the judgment He had poured out on them was over. He also said that He would deliver them from the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II. However, if they chose to go to Egypt for safety, then He would bring disaster upon them. Jeremiah suspected that they were merely looking for approval from Yahweh to go to Egypt and really had no intention of obeying, so he warned them again of disobeying Yahweh (Jer. 42:19-22). Johanan and Azariah accused Jeremiah of lying and conspiring against them with Baruch to kill them for a reward from Nebuchadnezzar II. So they disobeyed Yahweh and fled to Egypt, forcing Jeremiah to go with them (Jer. 43:1-7). By voluntarily returning to Egypt, the land of slavery, the people rejected the covenant, and the narrator says no more of them.

43:8-44:30 In Tahpanhes, Egypt, Yahweh told Jeremiah to take large stones and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace in front of the Jewish people. Then he was to tell them that Nebuchadnezzar II was going to come to Egypt to conquer the land and set up his throne on the large stones. They thought they were safe from Nebuchadnezzar II, but because they disobeyed Yahweh, He was sending Nebuchadnezzar to Egypt (Jer. 43:8-13).

The word of Yahweh came again to Jeremiah to remind the people of all the disaster He had brought on Jerusalem because His people had disobeyed Him. Yahweh then asked why they would bring even more destruction upon themselves by disobediently going to Egypt and cutting themselves off from the Promised Land. Yahweh declared that He was going to destroy them in Egypt (Jer. 44:1-14).

The Jewish men and women told Jeremiah that they were not going to listen to him and that they would not stop worshiping and burning incense to the Queen of Heaven. When they worshiped her in Judah, they had plenty and life was good, but when they stopped they lost everything

during the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar II. So now they had returned to their worship of the Queen of Heaven and would not stop (Jer. 44:15-19).

Jeremiah reminded them that it was their idolatry that led to Jerusalem being destroyed (Jer. 44:20-23). Jeremiah told them that because of their unwillingness to repent, no Jew would be left alive in Egypt when Nebuchadnezzar II came. The sign to validate the prophecy was that Yahweh would deliver Pharaoh Hophra into the hands of his enemies.

45:1-5 After Baruch had written all these words, Jeremiah confessed that he was worn out and filled with sorrow. Jeremiah told Baruch that Yahweh would protect Baruch and allow him to escape the coming judgment for his faithfulness.

Worldwide Judgment (46:1-52:34)

This division contains the oracles of Jeremiah that develop the theme of worldwide judgment that was introduced in Jer. 25:14-38:28. There are nine judgment oracles against various nations.

46:1-28 The first oracle is against Egypt. Egypt boasted that it was going to defeat Babylon, and in 605 Pharaoh Neco marched north to attack Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar II defeated Egypt at Carchemish, located on the lower part of the Euphrates River. Yahweh taunted Egypt and told them to march into battle just so they could run away when they were defeated. Egypt thought they were mighty like the Nile River, but in reality the nations would hear of Egypt's shame (Jer. 46:7-12). Yahweh declared that Egypt would be defeated. Babylon would be like a gadfly that stings the cow, which is Egypt. Egypt would flee like a serpent (Jer. 46:13-24). Yahweh would not only destroy Egypt but would also humiliate the gods of Egypt (Jer. 46:25-26). Yahweh ends by assuring Israel (Jacob) that He will bring them peace one day.

47:1-7 The second oracle is against the Philistines, who were located on the west coast of Israel. Egypt attacked the Philistine town of Gaza sometime between 610 and 601 BC. Yet Jeremiah seems to be referring to a Babylonian attack when calling the enemy "the waters rising in the north" (Jer. 47:2). The sword would not rest until they were all dead.

48:1-47 The third oracle is against Moab, located southeast of the Dead Sea. Yahweh declared the downfall of the Moabite towns of Nebo and Kiriathaim. Moabite refugees would be forced to flee for their lives while the leaders and their god Chemosh would be hauled off into exile (Jer. 48:2-10). Moab had been relatively secure and prosperous and had become complacent. But Moab would be destroyed, and the people would be ashamed of Chemosh, who did not protect them (Jer. 48:11-13). The warriors and towns would be cut down (Jer. 48:14-25). This judgment was deserved, for they had defied Yahweh by taunting His people after they were destroyed and by taking advantage of them. But now they would be taunted by the surrounding nations (Jer. 48:26-39). The enemy would swoop down upon them like an eagle, and they would be overtaken in the fire of judgment. The fugitives would be helpless to stop it (Jer. 48:40-47). However, Yahweh would one day restore them.

49:1-6 The fourth oracle is against Ammon, located on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The Ammonites had taken territory away from Israel, but Yahweh would lead an attack against its towns and reduce them to ruins. The self-assured Ammonites would be stricken with panic and forced to flee for their lives. Then Yahweh's people would reclaim the land that had been taken from them. However, Yahweh would one day restore them.

49:7-22 The fifth oracle is against Edom, located south of the Dead Sea. Raiders would move through Edom and ransack their wealth. Unlike most raiders, these would pick Edom dry, leaving nothing behind (Jer. 49:7-11). Edom would be the object of Yahweh's wrath and would be scorned by the nations. Yahweh, the lion, would consume them like He had Sodom and Gomorrah (Jer. 49:12-19). They would be dragged off like the young in a flock, and the sound of sorrow would fill the land at their demise (Jer. 49:20-22).

49:23-27 The sixth oracle is against Damascus, located north of Israel. It had already been destroyed by the Assyrians in 732 BC. Damascus had experienced some relief with the fall of Assyria, but Yahweh assured them that they would not escape the Babylonian judgment.

49:28-33 The seventh oracle is against Kedar and Hazor, which represented the Arab tribes of the Syrian desert. Yahweh would send Nebuchadnezzar to carry off their wealth, and the people would flee for their lives.

49:34-39 The eighth oracle is against Elam, located northeast of Babylon. Though Yahweh would scatter them, He promised to restore them one day.

50:1-51:64 The ninth oracle is against Babylon. Though Yahweh had used Babylon as His instrument of judgment, He would bring it to ruin with its god Bel/Marduk for its sins against the nations. This would be fulfilled by the Persian king Cyrus II in 539 BC ("a nation from the north"). With the fall of Babylon, the Israelite exiles would return to the Promised Land and make an everlasting covenant with Yahweh. The people of Israel were lost sheep devoured by the surrounding nations (Jer. 50:4-7).

The people of Babylon were now to flee their land with the coming of the Persian empire. Persia would surround them, overtake them, and plunder them (Jer. 50:8-16). Yahweh was punishing Babylon for devouring Israel. Babylon's downfall would allow for the return of His people. Israel's judgment would be over and their sins forgiven (Jer. 50:17-20).

Yahweh called for Babylon to be overtaken and destroyed (Jer. 50:21-32). Babylon refused to let Israel go, but Israel's Redeemer is stronger and would defend and rescue them (Jer. 50:33-34). Yahweh would bring His sword against Babylon. Babylon would become a deserted place, home to the wild animals, after the Persian army was done with them (Jer. 50:35-46). Yahweh continued to describe His purpose being carried out by the invading army and its destruction of Babylon (Jer. 51:1-14).

Jeremiah then began to describe and praise Yahweh as the sovereign creator of creation. And all the idols and its worshippers are senseless in light of Yahweh (Jer. 51:15-19). Yahweh uses the armies of the nations to punish all the other nations (Jer. 51:20-23). And Babylon would pay like all the other nations before it (Jer. 51:24-35). Yahweh would defend the cause of the righteous and destroy the oppressive nations (Jer. 51:36-58). Jeremiah gave this message to the staff officer Seraiah to take to Babylon. When he got there, he was to tie the scroll to a stone and throw it in the Euphrates River as an illustration of what will happen to Babylon for what they did to Judah.

52:1-34 The book concludes with the fall of Jerusalem that parallels 2 Kgs. 24-25. This epilogue was included to demonstrate the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. This section begins with the negative assessment of Zedekiah (597–586 BC).

After Nebuchadnezzar II, Evil-Marduk became king and released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison and sat him in the highest seat of honor. Jehoiachin removed his prison clothes and sat at the banquet table of Evil-Marduk the rest of his life (Jer. 52:31-34). The amnesty granted to

captive kings was not an uncommon pardon by Babylonian kings. Though the book of Jeremiah ends on an extremely negative note of the exile, it also ends with a glimmer of hope. There is no announcement of Jehoiachin's death; his clothes were renewed, and he was restored to a banquet table of blessing. Just as the prophets told of the coming exile of Israel and Judah, they also end with the promises of Yahweh's restoration back to the land of blessing. So, the book ends, not with the death of the royal line of Judah but with Yahweh's preservation and promise of restoration of the royal line that would lead to Christ.

Lamentations

The book of Lamentations was written in the aftermath of Jerusalem's fall. The author is not identified, but tradition attributes it to Jeremiah, probably because he experienced the fall of Jerusalem personally. Lamentations is placed after Jeremiah in the Septuagint (Greek translation) and the English Bible. However, in the Hebrew Bible Lamentations is in the third section, called "writings," with Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. The book is composed of five poems (that correspond with its chapters). The first four are written in an acrostic form.

Jerusalem in Ruins (1:1-22)

1:1-4 The poet mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem, which is compared to an abandoned and lonely widow who had once been an important princess. She spends her nights weeping because her lovers (treaties made with foreign nations) had left her. The roads to Jerusalem and gates mourn because they are all empty.

1:5-11 Because of her pride and rebellion, Yahweh gave her over to the Babylonians, who chased her down like a deer. Zion (Jerusalem) used to be prominent but was now taunted by the other nations. She is humiliated because of her promiscuous life. She had been looted, and her starving survivors had to trade the very few things they had left for food.

1:12-16 Zion then speaks of the depths of her misery. She says her suffering is the result of Yahweh's judgment for her rebellion that has burned her like a fire. She laments her defeat, which she compares to being trampled in the winepress.

1:17-22 She reaches out for help, but no one rescues her because Yahweh will not allow it. She professes that Yahweh is just in punishing her for her sins. She again laments her ruins, the starvation of the people, and the fact that her enemies rejoice over her ruin. She appeals to Yahweh for vengeance against her enemies, as He said He would.

Yahweh Is the Judge (2:1-22)

2:1-10 The poet laments that Zion used to be Yahweh's footstool for His throne in heaven (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Isa. 60:13), but Yahweh's fiery judgment had destroyed the city and its leaders. Yahweh had cut off all the horns (strength) and did not raise His "right hand" (power) against its invaders. Instead, He attacked His own people, destroying her fortresses and bring weeping to the nation. He even destroyed His temple, allowing the enemy to desecrate it. And all of its peoples are in exile.

2:11-19 The poet is overcome emotionally at the sight of starving children. The false prophets had promised deliverance instead of exposing the nation's sin. The enemy destroyed the city and bragged about its victory. The poet told the wall of the city to mourn the tragedy that had happened in the city.

2:20-22 Zion protests that Yahweh had never treated anyone as harshly as her. Mothers had gone insane and eaten their own children, priests and prophets were dead in the temple, and the streets were filled with the dead because Yahweh had destroyed them for their sin.

Reflecting of the Horror (3:1-66)

3:1-20 The poet describes how Yahweh ruthlessly attacked him and drove him from the light to the darkness. The poet describes what Yahweh's attack did to him in a series of descriptive metaphors. All the time Yahweh shut him in a dungeon and did not respond to his cries.

3:21-30 Despite this horror, the poet finds hope in the fact that even though the people of Yahweh had been judged, they had not been completely destroyed. Yahweh had remained faithful to His people and promised to spare a remnant from the destruction. The poet renewed his commitment to Yahweh and found comfort in submitting to Yahweh and trusting in Him for his future.

3:31-39 Though Yahweh disciplined them, He never abandoned them or stopped loving them. His love causes Him to pursue His people and show them compassion. Yahweh does not find pleasure in punishing His people; rather, He punishes them as a last resort because He loves them so much. Yahweh is a just God who blesses and brings judgment in accordance to what people deserve. When sinners experience disaster, it is because Yahweh punished them justly.

3:40-54 The poet then urges the survivors to cry out to Yahweh and repent of their sins that had brought them to this place of despair. The poet then voices his own lament at the destruction of Judah. He describes how the enemy had surrounded them and attacked them. Only Yahweh's saving intervention could bring them relief.

3:55-66 The poet turns to Yahweh for deliverance from their current calamity. Yahweh responds to his cry with the assuring words "do not fear," promising that relief would come. Convinced of Yahweh's faithfulness, he trusts in Yahweh to rescue him.

Yahweh's Divine Anger (4:1-22)

4:1-10 The poet returns to lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem and that the gold had lost its luster and the jewels were scattered in the streets, a metaphor for the young men of Jerusalem. They were once valued and respected, but now they are treated as nothing. The city is in despair as families starve. They once lived in luxury, but now they have nothing. Their destruction was worse than that of Sodom, for it is more merciful to die by the sword than to starve to death.

4:11-20 Yahweh poured out His anger in full measure. Though Jerusalem was considered unconquerable, Yahweh allowed the enemies to enter the city. Her sin led to her downfall. Religious leaders had become corrupt with their social injustice. They stained the city with the blood of their victims, but now they are covered in their own blood and shunned by those who see them. They are forced to wander through the nations as outcasts. Much to the shock of Jerusalem, no help came from anyone as Babylon entered their city.

4:21-22 The poet then talked about how Edom in the southeast turned on Jerusalem and exploited them when they were being attacked. The poet mockingly tells Edom to celebrate over Jerusalem all they want, but they too would be judged one day. Zion's exiles would return and find relief one day, but Edom would continue to suffer.

A Cry for Restoration (5:1-22)

5:1-5 The poet cries out to Yahweh to see the devastation of His people. Foreigners have overtaken the land, making them as vulnerable as orphans and widows. They are dependent on others for the most basic needs and are beaten down and unable to find relief.

5:6-7 He then looks to the past to find a reason for their present circumstances. In the past, Jerusalem made treaties with foreign nations and so were being punished for the previous generation's sins, though later he will confess his own sins (Lam. 5:16).

5:8-18 The poet continues to describe their present suffering under the subjugation of the "slaves" to other men, referring to those Babylon made governors over them in the land. They were risking their lives for food and suffering from diseases. Also, they were traumatized by the images of the horrors they witnessed when Babylon destroyed them. Their women were raped, the men were forced into labor camps, and the leaders had disappeared. Their sins had stripped them of the glory and respect they once had. Now all they saw was ruin.

5:19-22 But hope is not gone. The destruction of the temple does not mean Yahweh's temple has been removed. Yahweh reigns forever. The poet asks Yahweh to not forget them in their ruin and prays that He would restore them and reconcile them back to Himself.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel ministered to Judah (southern kingdom) from Babylon during 593–571 BC. Ezekiel received his prophetic call four years after the deportation of Jehoiachin (597 BC) in 597 BC. Ezekiel was from a priestly family and was carried off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar II in 597. The purpose of the book of Ezekiel was to declare that because of Israel's sins Yahweh's glory would depart from Israel but that one day He would give Israel and the nations a new heart so that His glory could dwell with them.

The book of Ezekiel is arranged in three major divisions. Ezek. 1:1-24:27 focuses on the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Ezek. 25:1-32:32 contains judgment oracles against several of the surrounding nations. And Ezek. 33:1-48:35 anticipates the reconciliation between Yahweh and Israel and the return of the exiles to a restored land that fills all the earth.

Sin and Judgment (1:1-24:27)

This division begins with the appearance of Yahweh before Ezekiel and his call to be prophet (Ezek. 1:1-3:27).

1:1-28 While Ezekiel was living in a refugee camp along the Kebar River in Babylon, Yahweh came to him in a vision. Ezekiel saw Yahweh coming in a whirlwind filled with fire and flashing lightning, much how Yahweh appeared to Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19). Whenever the storm or whirlwind is mentioned, it always refers to the appearance of Yahweh in judgment or to His using a foreign military against another nation in judgment (Job 30:21-23; 36:27-33; 38:1-3; 40:6; Ps. 11:6; 50:3-4; Prov. 1:24-27; 10:24-25; Isa. 40:23-24; Jer. 22:22; 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 1:4; 10; 30:3; Jonah 1:4; Nahum 1:3; Zech. 7:14; Heb. 12:18).

In the center of the whirlwind were four living creatures that had the form of a man, except that each one had four faces, one on each side of their heads. The face of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. These animals symbolically represented the wisdom (man), kingship (lion), strength (ox), and divinity (eagle) of Yahweh. They each had four wings, the hands of humans, and the feet of a calf. Two of their wings stretched out towards each other, so that they stood in a square to each other, with their bodies as the corners and their wings as the sides of the square. With their other two wings they covered their bodies. They looked like burning coals, and they moved in unison with the speed of lightning. The Spirit of Yahweh guided them in which direction they went.

Next to each living creature was a wheel within a wheel, most likely at right angles to each other so that they did not turn as they switched directions. The rims of the wheels were covered in eyes, which symbolically represented the all-knowingness of Yahweh. In their midst arose above them an expanse of crystal that would have reflected the fire of the whirlwind. On this was a throne of lapis lazuli. This is the chariot throne of Yahweh. Upon this chariot throne sat Yahweh, who had the appearance of glowing metal from the waist up and fire from the waist down. Above His head was a rainbow crown of light. This was the Shakinah glory of Yahweh appearing before Ezekiel. However, as a sinner Ezekiel would not have been able to fully see and enter the full presence of Yahweh. That is why he described seeing the *appearance* of the *likeness* of the *glory* of Yahweh. When Yahweh spoke, Ezekiel fell to the ground with fear and respect of Yahweh.

2:1-10 Yahweh addressed Ezekiel with the phrase “son of man,” an idiom that means “one who is human.” This phrase distinguishes him from the supernatural creatures he saw in the vision.

Yahweh told Ezekiel that He was sending him to the Israelites to preach a message of judgment to them. He warned them that they were rebellious and stubborn and would not listen, but to not be afraid of them and to speak His words to them whether they listened or not. Yahweh then handed Ezekiel a double-sided scroll with the words of judgment on them.

3:1-15 Yahweh then commanded Ezekiel to eat the scroll containing the message of destruction. Surprisingly, it tasted sweet despite its contents of doom. The point seems to be that Yahweh's word would sustain him in his mission and that speaking Yahweh's word would ironically provide him satisfaction despite its message of doom.³⁶ Yahweh told him to preach a message that would be difficult because the people were stubborn. Then the Spirit of Yahweh lifted Ezekiel up and took him to the exiles at the Keber River. Ezekiel was so overwhelmed by what he had seen that he sat there for a week processing it.

3:16-27 At the end of the week, Yahweh told Ezekiel that if He told him to call a wicked person to repent but Ezekiel did not obey, then that person would die and Ezekiel would be held accountable for the person's death. And if a righteous person turned to evil and Ezekiel did not call him to repent, then the person would die and Ezekiel would be held accountable for the person's death.

Then the glory of Yahweh appeared to Ezekiel, and the Spirit of Yahweh lifted Ezekiel up and told him to go to his house where he would be tied up and be unable to speak. This is most likely a metaphor for some kind of isolated time of silence before he began his ministry. At the appointed time Yahweh would send Ezekiel out to speak to the rebellious people.

4:1-16 Ezekiel's ministry began with two object lessons he was to act out (Ezek. 4-5). First, Yahweh commanded Ezekiel to carve a map of the city of Jerusalem on a block of clay and then build siege works around it. Then he was to stare at the city with a pan between himself and the city. His gaze represented Yahweh's determination to judge the city, and the pan represented the barrier between Yahweh and the city.

Ezekiel was then to lie on his left side for 390 days, representing the 390 years that Israel had sinned against Yahweh. Ezekiel's left side would bear the weight of his body just as Israel bore the weight of their sin. If one counts back 390 years from 593 BC, the date of the prophecy, one arrives at 983 BC, which was during the reign of David. It is not clear how this is the beginning of sin for Israel.³⁷ Then Ezekiel was to switch to his right side to represent the sin of Judah. This was to last for 40 days, representing forty years. If one counts back from 593 BC, one comes to 633 BC. Once again, it is not clear how this is the beginning of sin for Judah. Ezekiel was to be tied up, with a bare arm free and facing the city, which represented Yahweh's intention to come against the city as a warrior. Ezekiel most likely did this for a short period of time each day. Ezekiel was to eat and drink very little, representing how the people would starve while under siege. He was then to eat his food cooked over human feces, which would make him ritually unclean (Deut. 23:13-14). This represented how the people would have to eat ritually unclean food in exile. Ezekiel objected to this, for he did not want to become unclean, so Yahweh allowed him to cook the food over cow dung.

5:1-17 Yahweh then commanded Ezekiel to shave his head and beard with a sword. Then he was to burn a third of it in the map of the city, which symbolized the people dying of a plague and

³⁶ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 234.

³⁷ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 236.

famine in the city. He was to strike a third of the hair with a sword, which symbolized that the people would be killed by the sword outside the city. And he was to scatter a third of his hair to the wind, to symbolize the people being carried off into exile. Only then would Yahweh's punishment for Judah end.

6:1-14 Yahweh then gave Ezekiel two prophecies of judgment (Ezek. 6-7) that reiterated the previous object lessons (Ezek. 4-5). The people of Israel and Judah had erected altars to worship the pagan gods on top of the hills, which were called high places. Yahweh was about to come and destroy the high places, kill the people, and lay their dead bodies in front of the idols to show that their false gods could not protect them.

Some of them would escape only to be carried off into exile. There they would know the grief they had caused Yahweh and would mourn their sin. They would also know that Yahweh's threats of punishment were not empty. Then all the detestable practices of His people would be no more.

7:1-27 Ezekiel was then to prophecy the coming judgment of Babylon against Judah. There would be no more rejoicing or buying and selling, for the day of ruin was coming. The sword would come against the city, and everyone would mourn. Jerusalem took pride in their wealth and beauty, but now it would all be thrown into the street as they would be carried off in chains.

8:1-18 In 592 BC, Ezekiel received a vision of Yahweh leaving the temple. Ezekiel saw Yahweh on His throne again (Ezek. 1:28), and Yahweh reached out and lifted him up by the hair of his head, and the Spirit of Yahweh carried him to the north gate of the city of Jerusalem. There he saw the idol that provoked Yahweh to jealousy in the inner court of the temple. This may be the idol that King Manasseh had set up in the temple (2 Kgs. 21:7; 2 Chron. 33:7, 15). King Josiah had torn it down in (2 Chron. 33:15), but it must have been rebuilt.

Yahweh showed Ezekiel the detestable practices that were going on in the city and temple, things that would cause Yahweh to leave the city. Ezekiel was then commanded to dig through a hole in the wall to the temple, where inside he saw the images of unclean animals and insects inscribed on the walls. He also saw the elders of Judah performing pagan rites in the temple. Then he went out to the entrance and saw the women mourning before the god Tammuz. Tammuz was a Mesopotamian god who had been banished to the underworld, and its devotees mourned banishment. Then he saw men bowing down to the sun inside the inner court of the temple. Yahweh told Ezekiel that the people felt no guilt or shame doing such detestable things. But not only that, they had filled the land with social injustice as they oppressed the people of the land. It is not clear what the act of "putting the branch to their noses" means, but is probably connected to some kind of pagan ritual.

9:1-11 Yahweh then called forth six angelic beings to put to death the people in the city. One of them was a scribe that would record what happened. Then the chariot throne of Yahweh's glory (Ezek. 1) rose up, left the Holy of Holies, and rested at its threshold. Yahweh commanded the angelic beings to put a mark on the foreheads of all who were still loyal to Yahweh. The word translated "mark" is the Hebrew *tahv*, the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Ezekiel's time, it had the shape of an X or a cross.³⁸ Then Yahweh commanded the angelic beings to kill everyone in the temple and city who did not bear the mark. The dead bodies

³⁸ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 242.

littering the temple would defile the temple and make it unfit to worship there. Then one of the angelic beings announced that it was finished.

10:1-22 Ezekiel then saw Yahweh enthroned over the Cherubim at the southern part of the temple, which are the four living creatures of Ezek. 1 (Ezek. 10:15, 20). Yahweh commanded the angelic being clothed in linen to scatter the burning coals beneath the Cherubim over the city of Jerusalem, as a symbol of judgment on the city (Gen. 19:24; Ps. 11:6; 140:10), which would cleanse the city of its sin. Yahweh's glory then moved from the throne in the Holy of Holies to the Cherubim awaiting Him. Then one of the Cherubim took the fire that was among them and handed it to the man in linen. Ezekiel then described the movement of the wheels again (Ezek. 1:15-21). Then the Cherubim rose upwards with Yahweh's glory on them and moved to the eastern gate.

11:1-13 Then the Spirit of Yahweh lifted Ezekiel and carried him to the eastern gate, where he saw the twenty-five sun worshipers (Ezek. 8:16). Yahweh accused the men of plotting evil and then quoted them. The exact meaning of their phrase is unclear but may mean that they wanted to strengthen the defenses of the city against Yahweh's coming judgment of the Babylonian army. Yahweh then told Ezekiel to prophesy against the men—that they would die by the sword for their killing of innocent people in the city. As Ezekiel prophesied, one of the men died.

11:14-25 Yahweh told Ezekiel, though some of the Israelites were already out of the land and in exile, Yahweh would protect them and bring them back to the Promised Land one day. Then they would no longer have a divided heart and serve the idols. Yahweh would remove their heart of stone and give them a new heart. This heart is connected to the circumcision of the heart language of Moses and Jeremiah (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4).

Then the Cherubim and Yahweh's glory left the temple and went to the mountains east of the city. Then the Spirit of Yahweh lifted Ezekiel and carried him back to the exiles living in Babylon. There he told the exiles everything he had seen.

12:1-20 The exiles were a stubborn people who refused to see the truth. They thought Jerusalem would be delivered and they would be returning home soon. Yahweh told Ezekiel to give them a vivid object lesson to emphasize the point that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed and that their exile was going to last for a long time. Ezekiel was to pack up his belongings and in the evening dig a hole under the city wall and then leave with his belongings on his back and his face covered. This was to symbolize that the prince (probably King Zedekiah) was going to be taken into exile and not see the land to which he was being taken. The eyes being covered probably represents the fact that Nebuchadnezzar II blinded Zedekiah before hauling him off to Babylon. Then Ezekiel was to eat and drink while shaking to symbolize the anxiety and fear of the people when the Babylonians came.

12:21-13:23 There was a proverb in Israel that expressed the doubt of the people that the prophecies of the prophets of Yahweh would come true. So Yahweh said that the time was coming when the prophecies would be fulfilled and the proverbs would come to an end.

Yahweh then told Ezekiel to prophesy against the false prophets who were spreading false lies about the survival of Jerusalem. Yahweh also condemned the magic charms that the women sold to people in order to protect them from the coming destruction.

14:1-11 Yahweh then told Ezekiel to encourage the idolaters of Israel to repent, get rid of their idols, and turn back to Yahweh so they may be able to live. But if they did not repent, then

Yahweh was going to destroy them. Yahweh would destroy the false prophet so that Israel would no longer be led astray.

14:12-23 The destruction of Jerusalem was so inevitable that even if there were godly men like Noah, Daniel, and Job living in it, it would not be spared from the coming judgment. Yet Yahweh promised to preserve some and send them to Ezekiel in exile where they would see their sinful behavior and become convinced that Yahweh was just in destroying Jerusalem.

15:1-8 Yahweh made the point that grapevines were useless compared to the wood of trees. One can make something out of the wood of a tree and then continue to enjoy the thing that had been built. But once they had stopped producing, grapevines were useful only for burning, and then they were even more useless after being burned. The people had become like dead grapevines, and Yahweh was going to burn them in the fire of His judgment.

16:1-63 Yahweh told a graphic parable of Jerusalem's history: Israel was born to the pagan and immoral parents of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother, which referred to Israel being controlled and influenced by the Canaanites when they first entered the land, recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges. When Yahweh had first found Jerusalem, it was an abandoned newborn wallowing in its own blood, which pointed to Jerusalem's insignificance in its early days and how no one valued her. But Yahweh found her, cleaned her, and planted her in the land so that she could grow and prosper. Then she grew up, and Yahweh clothed and adorned her when He made a covenant with her. He then prospered her so that they became a powerful nation, referring to the time of David and Solomon.

But then she became vain in her beauty and began to prostitute herself to many lovers, referring to her idolatry during the time of the many kings after Solomon. She took the jewelry that Yahweh had given her and offered it to her lovers and then took the children that Yahweh had given her and sacrificed them to the pagan gods. She became worse than a prostitute because she offered herself to others for free and then even paid her lovers to sleep with her, referring to the treaties that Israel made with the foreign nations. She fit the saying "like mother, like daughter," referring to the Canaanites and then Jerusalem. Jerusalem became like her sisters Sodom and then Samaria (Israel), who also slept with lovers and ignored the needy. But now she had become so much worse than them, that she made them look righteous. Yahweh had disciplined her many times over the years, but now it was time for drastic measures. Yet Yahweh would remember His covenant and restore her one day and establish a new and everlasting covenant with her.

17:1-24 Next, Yahweh told Ezekiel a parable of eagles and a vine and then explained the meaning. The first eagle was Nebuchadnezzar II, the king of Babylon, who swept down on Lebanon (Jerusalem) and took King Jehoiachin and the nobility (the cedar branch) into exile (the land and city of the raiders). Nebuchadnezzar II made a treaty with Zedekiah, who ruled over the weakened land (the vine). Then Zedekiah turned against Nebuchadnezzar II and made a treaty with the pharaoh of Egypt. When Zedekiah made his oath with Nebuchadnezzar II, he took it in the name of Yahweh (2 Chron. 36:13). Therefore, when Zedekiah broke his oath with Nebuchadnezzar II, it was the same as breaking a treaty with Yahweh. For this Yahweh would punish him severely.

Yahweh then told a second parable. No explanation is given, but the meaning seems clear. Yahweh would one day raise up the ideal Davidic king (shoot/sprig) from Jehoiachin (597 BC) as the last ruling king in the line of David (cedar branch), and his kingdom would extend over

all the nations (birds). The kings of the nations (the trees of the fields) would recognize Yahweh's sovereignty, as He can do anything He wants with any tree.

18:1-32 The people of Jerusalem quoted a parable to make the point that they were being treated unfairly by Yahweh in His judgment. Yahweh set them straight with a series of illustrations. The first illustration (Ezek. 18:5-9) is of a righteous man who does not sacrifice to the false gods, does not sin sexually, does not oppress anyone, does not cheat or steal, and takes care of the needy. This man would surely live, for he is obedient to the law. The second illustration (Ezek. 18:10-13) is of the son of the righteous man, but he murders others and does not act like his father even though the father has not modeled bad behavior. He does the complete opposite of the father. This man will not live even though his father did, for he violated the law. The third illustration (Ezek. 18:14-18) is of the son of the wicked man. He is righteous and acts like the righteous grandfather (Ezek. 18:5-9). Yahweh stated that he would not die for his father's sins, for he is not his father. People will be held accountable and judged for their own crimes, regardless of what their parents have done.

However, this does not mean that wicked people have no hope. For if a wicked man were to repent of his sins and obey Yahweh, then all his crimes would be forgotten and he would live. Yahweh does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that they turn back to Him and live (Ezek. 18:21-23). In contrast, the righteous person who turns to evil will die for his sin despite his previous righteous acts (Ezek. 18:24). Yahweh then told His people that they then could not accuse Him of being unjust.

How does this reconcile with passages of corporate punishment, where Yahweh did punish the children for the sins of the parents (Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; 16:27, 32; Josh. 7:24; 2 Sam. 21:1-9, 14)? One should not see this as a new policy of individual justice replacing His old policy of corporate punishment. There is nothing here that even hints at Yahweh's bringing about a new policy. Rather, both are true. Yahweh, in His wisdom, evaluates each act of disobedience based on the circumstances. Sometimes He deems that the children are to be punished based on how they had been influenced by the parents, while other times the children are given the opportunity to make their own choices. Only Yahweh sees the heart and the bigger picture.³⁹

19:1-14 Yahweh told two parables. The first (Ezek. 19:1-9) was of the Davidic line (mother lioness) that produced two specific kings (the two lions). The first was King Jehoahaz (609 BC), who ruled for only three months before he was captured and taken to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kgs. 23:31-33). The second was Jehoiakim (609–598 BC), who was an oppressive king who committed many acts of social injustice. Nebuchadnezzar bound him with shackles and took him to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6).

The second parable (Ezek. 19:10-14) is of the Davidic line (the mother), who became powerful and had many descendants (branches). But then it was carried off by the Babylonians (east wind), where Jehoiachin (697 BC) was in exile in Babylon. The fire consuming its fruit describes the fall of the Davidic dynasty and anticipates the demise of King Zedekiah (597–586 BC).

20:1-44 In 591 BC, some of the elders in exile came to Ezekiel and asked him to consult Yahweh on their behalf to find out when they would be able to return to the land. However, Yahweh refused to answer them and instead told Ezekiel to confront them with their sinful

³⁹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 254-255.

history. When Yahweh chose Israel to be His covenant people, He promised to deliver them from Egypt and take them to the Promised Land. He commanded them to get rid of their idols in Egypt (Josh. 24:14), but instead they rebelled. So Yahweh swore He would punish them for their rebellion and idolatry. But because He is a merciful God, He delivered them into the wilderness and revealed His law to them so the nations would see His mercy. If they obeyed His law, then they would live. Instead, they worshiped the golden calf in the wilderness, and Yahweh swore that He would punish them. But because He is a merciful God, He led them to the Promised Land and told the children to not rebel like their parents did so the nations would see His mercy. But they rebelled as well (the generations of the judges), so Yahweh swore that He would punish them. But because He is a merciful God, He spared them so the nations would see His mercy. Yet in the wilderness, Yahweh also told them that He would take them into exile one day when their sins had become too great.

The people wanted to be like the nations and worship idols, but Yahweh would not allow this to happen. Yahweh would one day take them out of the nations and lead them into the wilderness, where He would bring them under a purifying judgment. Yahweh was determined to sanctify them into a people who would no longer rebel and worship idols. One day He would gather them at His holy mountain, and they would truly know that He is the only true God and worship Him.

20:45-21:35 Yahweh commanded Ezekiel to prophesy against Judah (southern forest in the south) that Babylon (fire) was coming to consume them. Ezekiel then told Yahweh that the people were accusing him of just telling parables instead of telling what was really going to happen. Then Yahweh spoke in plain language, saying that He was going to destroy Jerusalem with the sword. Ezekiel was then to cry out and mourn so that everyone would ask him why he mourned, and then he would tell them what was coming.

The sword was Nebuchadnezzar II, and he had to options as he moved south (Ezek. 21:18-23). He could veer to the east and invade Ammon on the eastern side of the Jordan River, or he could veer west and attack Jerusalem. He would seek omens to know which path to take, and they would point to Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem would say it was a false omen since they made a treaty with him, but he would counter that they broke that treaty. Then the Ammonites would see that Nebuchadnezzar II had chosen to destroy Jerusalem instead of them, and they would rejoice and insult Jerusalem. But Yahweh promised that the same sword that was going to destroy Jerusalem would also destroy them (Ezek. 21:28-32).

22:1-31 Ezekiel was to judge Jerusalem for shedding innocent blood and worshiping idols. Therefore, Yahweh would make them an object of scorn before all the nations. The kings of Judah had used their power to shed innocent blood, oppress their people, desecrate the holy festivals of Yahweh with their idolatry and evil, practice sexual immorality, take bribes, and extort the poor.

The people had become like dross to Yahweh, which was the impurities left on the furnace floor after metals had been purified. So Yahweh was going to gather them together in Jerusalem and melt them in the wrath of His fiery judgment (Ezek. 22:17-22).

Jerusalem had not been cleansed of their sins, and their kings conspired to devour the people. The priests violated the law, the officials were like devouring wolves, the prophets told of false visions, and the people oppressed the poor and mistreated the foreigner (Ezek. 22:23-29). Yahweh looked for someone who would rise up and promote justice but found no one. Therefore, He would punish them for their sins.

23:1-49 Yahweh told a parable of two sisters to whom He was married. These sisters are the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Though the text does not specifically say they were married to Yahweh, this is the assumption of the metaphor. In the Hebrew, Ezek. 23:5 literally reads “while she was under me,” which refers to the authority of a husband over the wife (Num. 5:19-20, 29). The name of the sisters comes from the Hebrew word ‘*ohel*, which means “tent.”

These sisters prostituted themselves in Egypt and continued to do so while they lived in Canaan. Israel’s giving herself to the Assyrian soldiers refers to the treaties she made with the Assyrian empire. Therefore, Yahweh gave her over to her lovers, and they destroyed her. Judah was worse than Israel and also lusted after Assyria. But she also gave herself to Babylon (Chaldeans). Like Israel before her, she would be given over to her lovers, and they would destroy her as well. Judah would drink the same cup of wrath that her sister drank (Ezek. 23:32-34). Judah would be destroyed because of her immorality and carefree attitude about it. Yahweh would bring an end to the lewdness in the land.

24:1-14 In 588 BC, the Babylonians laid siege to the city of Jerusalem, which would end in it being sacked in 586 BC. Yahweh told Ezekiel to put on the cooking pot and boil the meat in it. This was an illustration of what was going to happen to Jerusalem for the next two years while they were under siege. Yahweh would bring bloodshed to the city that had shed so much innocent blood. Jerusalem would be purified of its lewdness in the fires of judgment.

24:15-27 Yahweh then told Ezekiel that his wife was going to die, but he was not allowed to publicly mourn in the traditional way of the Israelites. When the people saw his strange behavior, they correctly assumed that it had something to do with them. Just as Ezekiel’s wife was the delight of his eyes, so Yahweh’s sanctuary in Jerusalem was the delight of the people’s eyes. It had become the object of their affection instead of Yahweh. And just as Ezekiel’s wife died, so Yahweh was about to desecrate and destroy His sanctuary. He then would take the lives of the children of Jerusalem, some of whom belonged to those who were in exile. Just as Ezekiel did not mourn the death of his wife, so would they be shocked and stunned into silence when they heard of the destruction of the temple.

Disaster for Judah’s Neighbors (25:1-32:32)

This division contains the judgment oracles against the neighboring nations of Judah. Seven nations are targeted, suggesting completeness and finality. There are then three oracles given against Tyre and seven against Egypt.

25:1-7 The first oracle was against Ammon, located east of Judah. The Ammonites gloated over Jerusalem when it fell. Yahweh said He would send Arabian nomadic invaders to plunder them.

25:8-11 The second oracle was against Moab, located southeast of Judah and the Dead Sea. The Moabites also gloated over Jerusalem when it fell. Yahweh would also bring the Arabian nomadic invaders to plunder them.

25:12-14 The third oracle was against Edom, located south of Judah and the Dead Sea. Edom had treated Judah in a harsh way, so Yahweh was going to use the Israelites to destroy them.

25:15-17 The fourth oracle was against the Philistines, who were located to the west of Judah on the coast. Because they had also treated Israel harshly, Yahweh was going to carry out His vengeance on them.

26:1-21 The fifth oracle was against Tyre, located north of Judah on the coast. Tyre gloated over Judah when it fell. Tyre was a prosperous city that hoped to become more prominent and control the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea after Judah fell. However, Yahweh was going to send waves of nations against Tyre to reduce it to rock where fishermen would dry their nets. Specifically, Yahweh would send Nebuchadnezzar II to attack and break down the walls of the city and then destroy it.

27:1-36 Ezekiel's lament sounds more like a taunt against Tyre. Ezekiel recalled Tyre's prominence and wealth and how the city sent its goods throughout the world by trade. However, Babylon came and sunk them like a ship and scattered their wealth across the bottom of the sea.

28:1-19 This would be a taunt against Ethbaal, the king of Tyre at this time in Ezekiel's life. Ethbaal had delusions of grandeur and thought of himself as a god, like many other kings in the ancient world thought of themselves. But he was merely a man, and his wisdom was not even as great as Daniel's. He had amassed great wealth and thought he was untouchable, but Yahweh would bring him down to the grave. Then he would not be so arrogant and claim he was a god.

Yahweh then compared Ethbaal with Adam in the Garden of Eden. Both were prominent and lived in great wealth and prosperity in their kingdoms. But like Adam, who was cast out of the garden for his pride and autonomy, so the king of Tyre would be cast from his throne for his pride and autonomy.

The traditional translation of Ezek. 28:14 is "I placed you, and you were an anointed guardian cherub." However, this reading is problematic for two reasons. First, there is no story of a proud cherub who fell anywhere in the Bible or outside the Bible. Second, the pronoun "you" ('at) at the beginning of verse is feminine singular in the Hebrew text, whereas elsewhere in this passage the ruler of Tyre is addressed with masculine singular forms. It is possible that the pronoun is defectively written masculine form (1 Sam. 24:19; Neh. 9:6; Job 1:10; Ps. 6:3; Ecc. 7:22). But it is more likely that the form should be repointed as the preposition "with" ('et, see the LXX). In this case, the king of Tyre is compared to the first man, not to a cherub. Then it would read, "I placed you there with an anointed cherub." This fits the context of the passage and the Bible a lot better.⁴⁰

28:20-26 The sixth oracle was against Sidon, located north of Tyre. Sidon also treated Judah harshly, and so they would die by both a plague and the sword. This would then be followed by the return of Yahweh's people from exile. Then the surrounding nations would recognize Yahweh's sovereignty.

29:1-16 The seventh oracle was against Egypt, located southwest of Judah on the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In 587 BC, Yahweh instructed Ezekiel to deliver a prophecy about the downfall of Egypt. Yahweh opposed Pharaoh Hophra, whom He referred to as the great monster (*tannin*) that lurks in Egypt's streams. This Hebrew word *tannin* often is used of the serpent (Ex. 7:9-10, 12; Deut. 32:33; Ps. 91:13). In several texts it is used of a mythical chaos monster (Job. 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Jer. 51:34). Most likely, Yahweh was connecting Pharaoh to a crocodile of mythical proportions that brought chaos and death to everything. Pharaoh saw himself as a god of the Nile and Egypt, but Yahweh was going to put hooks in him and make him food for the beasts (nations) of the earth.

⁴⁰ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 269-270.

Egypt had promised to fight for Judah against Babylon but had betrayed them, like leaning on a reed for support, which then breaks and stabs you. Therefore, Yahweh was going to bring the sword to Egypt and destroy it, and then they would know that He is Yahweh. However, Yahweh promised to return the Egyptians back to their land at the end of forty years. But it would never be the great nation it was ever again.

29:17-21 The loot from Tyre had not given Nebuchadnezzar II the payment that his soldiers needed and anticipated. So Yahweh promised He would give Egypt to them to make up for the disappointment of Tyre. At the same time, Yahweh would revive the power of His people.

30:1-26 The day had come to lament the destruction of Egypt and all of its allies by the sword. The land would be devastated, the idols destroyed, and the people carried away on the day that Yahweh sent His storm of judgment. In 587 BC, Yahweh used Babylon to metaphorically break Pharaoh's arm, which is a metaphor of his military might (Ezek. 30:20-26). Yet Yahweh had planned to finish him completely and break both his arms.

31:1-18 Two months later, Yahweh reminded Pharaoh that Assyria had once been great like a mighty cedar that sheltered the nations of the world. But eventually, Yahweh brought them low because of their pride. So the same was true for Egypt, who would fall just like Assyria had.

32:1-32 In 585 BC, Yahweh revealed to Ezekiel that even though Pharaoh was the great monster of the sea, Yahweh did not fear him and would enlist "a great throng of people," a reference to the Babylonian hordes, and hunt Pharaoh down with His net. Yahweh would throw the sea monster onto the land, where it would be devoured by scavengers. The darkness of judgment would overtake the cosmos, and the nations would be filled with fear when they heard of Egypt's demise. As Pharaoh and his armies descended into the grave, other fallen warriors from defeated nations would be there to greet them (Ezek. 32:17-32). All kings fall.

The Restoration of Israel (33:1-48:35)

The final division anticipates the fulfillment of Yahweh's ideal plan to restore His covenant people.

33:1-20 If a watchman sounds the warning of invasion and the people do not heed it and then die, their blood is on their own heads. But if the watchman does not sound the warning of invasion and the people die, then their blood is on the head of the watchman. So the same was true for Ezekiel as the prophetic watchman. Yahweh reminded Ezekiel that if a wicked person repents, they would be forgiven. But if a righteous person turns to evil, all their righteous acts would be forgotten.

33:21-33 In 585 BC, a man arrived in the Babylonian refugee camp and told Ezekiel and the other exiles that Jerusalem had fallen, which had occurred months earlier in the summer of 586 BC. But those who were left in the land were convinced that the Promised Land now belonged to them. Yet Yahweh would correct them—that they had broken the covenant and would be killed and leave the land empty. The people of the exile found listening to Ezekiel enjoyable, but they had no desire to internalize his message and so be changed by it. Yet when his prophecies came true, they would be forced to acknowledge that he had been a genuine prophet of Yahweh.

34:1-31 Comparing the leaders of Judah with shepherds, He condemned them for not taking care of the people they were to lead. He accused them of looking to their own interests instead of caring for the people. They took from the people and oppressed them. Thus, Yahweh would

punish the leaders by removing them from power, and then He would deliver His people from oppression.

Yahweh then declared that He would gather His sheep from exile and lead them back to the land where He Himself would be their shepherd. He would promote justice and show special consideration to the oppressed (the strays and the injured) but would punish the oppressors (the sleek and strong). He would save undernourished sheep from the well-fed ones that pushed the weaker ones out of the way. Then He would put them under the care of His special servant David.

Yahweh would then make a covenant of peace with the regathered flock and would eliminate the predators in the land and assure their security. Yahweh would send the rain, the land would flourish with crops, and everyone would acknowledge Him as their king and savior.

35:1-36:15 Yahweh condemned Edom for attacking Israel with the sword; therefore, He would give them over to the raiders in the Arabian desert. Yahweh would desolate the land of Edom because they tried to take Israel's land that really belonged to Yahweh.

Other nations shared Edom's desire to take the lands of Israel. Thus, Yahweh would also punish the surrounding nations. Yahweh would bring Israel back to the land, where He would increase their numbers, make the mountains of Israel flourish, and rebuild the cities (Ezek. 26:1-15).

36:16-38 Sinful Israel was a disgrace to Yahweh, for they had defiled the land with their idolatry and murderous deeds. To emphasize this, He compared Israel to the dead blood on a menstrual cloth. For this reason, He would scatter them among the nations. Yet the nations had reasoned that Yahweh was unable to protect His people. So, Yahweh would have to demonstrate His power and restore His people back to the land so that He could restore His reputation among the nations.

Once they were back in the land, Yahweh would cleanse their hearts so that they would be able to obey. Yahweh would remove their hearts of stone and give them a new heart and put His spirit in them so that they would be able to obey His laws. This is a fulfillment of Deut. 10:12-16 and 30:6, where Moses said that Israel's heart was stone and that they needed to have their hearts circumcised so that they could obey.

In the First Testament, no one had the Spirit of Yahweh dwelling in them. The Spirit of Yahweh came upon only a select few, to enable them to perform a task. Yet Yahweh told of a day when His Spirit would enter all of His people and remain in them. This points to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Israel would then be able to have a more intimate relationship with Yahweh, and He would save them from their uncleanness. Yahweh would then make the land flourish and the fruit abundant. This change in their hearts would cause them to look back on their sinful past life with shame. In the land, Yahweh would make them flourish as He rebuilt their cities and lands, making it like the garden of Eden.

37:1-14 The spirit of Yahweh took Ezekiel to a valley filled with human bones. Yahweh asked him if the bones could live again, to which Ezekiel said only Yahweh knew. Yahweh then told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. When he did, the bones came back together, and tendons and flesh returned to the bodies, but they were not alive. Then Yahweh told Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath so that it would go into the bodies and make them live again. When the breath of Yahweh entered the bodies, they were filled with life and became a vast army.

Yahweh said that these were the people of Israel who had lost hope and that He was going to bring them out of their graves (exile) and lead them back to the land. There He would put His Spirit in them so that they would be one with Him.

37:18-28 Yahweh told Ezekiel to take two sticks and then to write the name of Judah on one and on the other the name of Joseph—representing Ephraim, the head of the ten northern tribes of Israel—and join them together in the same hand. The point of this is that Yahweh would one day return the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah from exile and rejoin them into one kingdom in the Promised Land. There they would no longer defile themselves with idols or any other sin, and Yahweh would save them from their backsliding and cleanse them.

Yahweh would then make his servant David king over them, and they would recognize Him as their only shepherd. They would live in the land and follow the law of Yahweh. All their children would live with them forever, never again to be exiled from the land. All the nations would then know that He was the sovereign God for them to come to in worship.

38:1-39:29 Yahweh then describes King Gog from Magog, who would lead an alliance of many nations to attack and destroy Israel. Nothing has been discovered from the ancient East to match up with these names. The names Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Togarmah appear in Gen. 10:2-3 as the descendants of Japheth located in Anatolia (modern day Turkey). The appearance of seven nations from different names allied with Gog suggest a completion of all the nations. Thus, Gog is a typology of all the nations.

Gog's horde would march against Israel, not realizing that their attack was orchestrated by Yahweh in order to bring about their demise and demonstrate His own sovereign power. Yahweh would annihilate the horde with His supernatural fire (Ezek. 38:18-22; 39:3-6), and the scavengers would feed on their bodies. The people of Israel would burn the weapons of the horde for seven days, and their burial would take seven months. The sevens communicate the completeness of Gog's army being defeated. Israel's enemies of Yahweh would then realize that Israel's exile was due to their sin, not the weakness of Yahweh. The only place this battle is mentioned in the Second Testament is Rev. 20:7-10, where all the nations are defeated at the end of the millennial age.

Ezekiel then shifts to the restoration of Yahweh's people from exile and into a land that is flourishing. Yahweh would pour out His Spirit on them, and they would renounce their sin and recognize Yahweh as their sovereign king.

40:1-42:20 Ezekiel was then taken by the Spirit of Yahweh to the land of Israel, where he saw an angelic surveyor who told him to write down everything he saw. Ezekiel then records the detailed description of the rebuilt temple with precise measurements. The most significant measurements are the courtyard, the gates, and the temple. The courtyard wall around the temple was 175 feet wide and long, and the courtyard wall was 10.5 feet tall. There were three gates, one on the south, the east, and the north. The gates were 43.75 feet wide and 105 feet tall, and the entrance into the gate was 17.5 feet wide and 22.75 feet tall. The temple was 35 feet wide and 105 feet long and 35 tall. The greatest significance of this is that with the tabernacle and temple, there was only one gate, and it was the same height as the courtyard wall. With the new temple, there are three gates facing different directions, which are much larger than the walls. The point is that the new temple is far more accessible to people from all nations than the tabernacle and the previous temple were.

43:1-46:24 Several years previously, the glory of Yahweh left the temple in Jerusalem. Now the glory of Yahweh returned through the eastern gate and filled the temple where Yahweh would establish His throne forever. Ezekiel then gave detailed instructions concerning the temple regulations and service. He described the design of the altar (Ezek. 43:13-17) and gave instructions concerning the dedicatory sacrifices (Ezek. 43:18-27). Then the eastern gate that Yahweh entered through would be permanently shut to commemorate Yahweh's arrival. Only the “prince,” who is the Davidic king, would be allowed to sit in the gate as he ate in the presence of Yahweh (Ezek. 44:1-3).

The first regulation was that foreigners were prohibited from entering the temple (Ezek. 44:6-9). This cannot be foreigners in general, for the prophets have already made it clear that all the nations would come to the new temple (Mic. 4:1-7; 7:16-17; Isa. 2:2-4; 11:10; 19:18-25; 40:6-7; 49:6; 55:3-5; 56:3-8; 60:1-11; 66:12; Zeph. 3:9-12; 66:17-19; Jer. 3:16-18; Ezek. 17:22-24). These are those people who have not come to Yahweh in faith and become circumcised in the heart.

Second, because of the unfaithfulness of the Levites, their duties in the temple would be limited (Ezek. 44:10-31). They would be able to serve in the temple gates and make sacrifices, but they would not be able to enter the temple and handle the holy items of the temple. Only the descendants of Zadok, who had remained faithful to Yahweh, would be able to enter the temple.

Third, the prince would have the land closest to the temple and lead the people in worship and make atonement for the people (Ezek. 45:1-46:24). He would also lead the festivals in which the people participate.

47:1-12 Ezekiel then saw a river flowing out of the temple and to the Dead Sea, where it is transformed from saltwater to fresh water and begins to thrive with fish. All along the river life flourished.

47:13-48:35 The prophecy ends with the borders of the Promised Land and the tribal allotment. The Land would be restored to what it was in Num. 34. This vision was not fulfilled after Israel's return and has not since then. Some say this is literally what the temple would look like in the second coming of Christ. The problem is that Yahweh never wanted a temple to begin with, and Rev. 21:22 specifically says there will be no temple, for the Lamb is the temple. Likewise, this temple would not be big enough for all the nations. There is also no need for sacrifices now that Christ has become the perfect sacrifice.

This temple is described in a contextualized way for his original audience to understand the plan of Yahweh's future redemption of His people. They could only comprehend their reconciliation with Yahweh through the temple. Yet the temple symbolically painted a picture of what Yahweh was going to do through Christ in the first and second comings. The Second Testament writers make it clear that Christ is the temple (Jn. 2:18-22; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10) and that the church is an extension of Him as the temple (Jn. 14:23; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10). But the vision assigning land to the tribes anticipates the restoration of ethnic Israel (Rom. 11:25-32). Jesus' sacrifice has made the Levitical priest obsolete (Heb. 9:1-10:8); therefore, there is no need for the unfaithful Levites. The river that flows out of the temple is seen in Rev. 22:1-5, but it is coming from the throne of Yahweh and the lamb because they are the temple (Rev. 21:22).

Conclusion

Ever since Yahweh first brought Israel out of Egypt, they had rebelled and sinned against Yahweh. No matter how many times Israel repented, they always went back to their sinful ways. Yahweh sent His prophets to warn of the coming exile that Moses said would come one day (Deut. 28:15-68). The sins Yahweh specifically condemned in Israel through the prophets was their idolatry and social injustice. This was amplified through their religious hypocrisy, when they would go into the temple and worship Yahweh without repentance for their sins. Thus, Yahweh sent the Assyrian empire to take Israel in the north into exile in 722 BC and the Babylonian empire to take Judah in the south into exile in 586 BC. Yet Yahweh was unable to destroy them completely because of His character and His promises to restore them one day (Hos. 11:8-11).

Israel was unable to obey Yahweh because they did not know Him in a relational way that transformed them. Therefore, Yahweh promised to not only restore Israel one day but to heal Israel's heart so that they could know and love Yahweh. Yahweh promised that He would restore Israel to the Promised Land, establish a new faithful Jerusalem with a righteous Davidic king in the land, and make a new covenant with them. (Amos 9:11-15; Hos. 1:10-12; 2:14-23; 3:4-5; 11:10-11; 14:4-7; Mic. 2:12-13; 4:1-8; 5:1-5; 7:8-20; Isa. 2:2-3; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 19:18-25; 42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3; 66:17-24; Zeph. 3:9-20; Jer. 23:5-8; 30:1-31:40; 32:36-44; 33:6-26; Ezek. 34:7-31; 36:1-48:35)

Yahweh would return Israel to the Promised Land (Amos 9:11-15; Hos. 1:10-12; 2:14-15; 3:5; 11:10-11; 14:5-7; Mic. 2:12-13; 4:1-2, 6-7; 7:8-13; Isa. 2:2-3; 11:10-16; 30:19-26; 40:1-5; 49:8-13; 66:20-21; Zeph. 3:19-20; Jer. 23:6-8; 30:1-31:40; 32:36-44; 33:6-26; Ezek. 36:24-32; 37:15-23 39:25-29).

Yahweh will establish a New Jerusalem (Mic. 4:1-2; Isa. 2:2-4; Ezek. 40:1-48:35).

The New Jerusalem will also be Yahweh's holy cosmic mountain (Mic. 4:1-2; Isa. 2:2-4; 24:23; 25:6-9; Ezek. 40:1-48:35).

Yahweh will dwell there with His covenant people (Isa. 2:2-4; Zeph. 3:16-17; Ezek. 34:7-31; 37:27-28; 39:29; 43:1-12).

Yahweh will establish His righteous Davidic king to rule over the New Jerusalem (Amos 9:11-12; Hos. 3:4; Mic. 5:1-5; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5, 10; 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3; Jer. 23:5; 30:9, 21; 33:14-22; Ezek. 17:22-24; 34:23-24; 37:24-28).

All the nations will come streaming to His holy city/mountain (Mic. 4:1-7; 7:16-17; Isa. 2:2-4; 11:10; 19:18-25; 40:6-7; 49:6; 55:3-5; 56:3-8; 60:1-11; 66:12; Zeph. 3:9-12; 66:17-19; Jer. 3:16-18; Ezek. 17:22-24).

Yahweh will make the New Jerusalem like the Garden of Eden (Amos 9:13-15; Hos. 2:14-23; 14:5-7; Ezek. 47:1-12).

This Garden of Eden will cover all the world (Mic. 5:1-9; Isa. 2:2-4; 24:21-23; 66:12; Zeph. 3:9-12; Ezek. 47:1-12).

There will be no evil in the land (Mic. 4:3-4; Isa. 2:4; 11:6-9; 24:21-23; 25:6-9; 27:1; 30:19-26; Ezek. 38:1-39:29).

Yahweh will make His covenant people a faithful people (Mic. 4:2; Hos. 14:4; Isa. 2:3; Zeph. 3:11-13; Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:25-32).

This will be made possible by a New Covenant Yahweh would establish with His covenant people (Hos. 2:18-23; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60-63; 34:25-31; 37:26-28).

This covenant will not be broken like the Mosaic Covenant (Jer. 31:32; 33:19-22; Ezek. 37:26).

Yahweh will write His Law on His covenant people's hearts and minds (Jer. 31:33-34; 32:39; Ezek. 36:26-27).

Yahweh will also place His Spirit in all His covenant people (Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:1-14; 39:29).

Yahweh's covenant people will all know His will (Hos. 2:16-17; Jer. 31:33-34).

Yahweh will remove and forgive His covenant people's sins (Jer. 31:34; 33:8; 50:20; 53:4-5; Ezek. 36:25-32; 39:25-27).

This will be made possible through the Messiah's death and resurrection (Isa. 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12).

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